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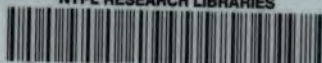
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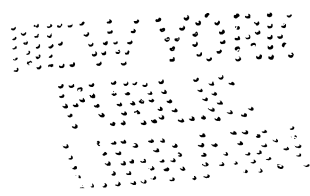
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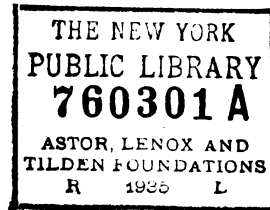


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TO THE DREAM-GIVER

Take Thou the Vision ; lo, it stands
Securely wrought : it is not mine.
Take Thou the toil of human hands,
The Vision and the Toil are Thine.

I am Thy servant ; I but speak
The message of Thy silent lips ;
Mine is the utterance—how weak !
But Thine the strong Apocalypse.

Dread grace of God, transcending law,
On Thee my human spirit leant ;
Me Thou didst choose ; forgive the flaw
Within Thy faulty instrument.

For I have uttered Thy command ;
And now I wait, with watchful eyes
Turned seaward, all the thing I planned,—
The sailing of Thy Argosies.

The undiscovered land grows clear,
The purple sail now takes the breeze ;
And Thou, while human strength shalt steer,
Wilt walk before us on the seas.

Take Thou the Vision ; lo, it stands
Securely wrought, divinely new !
Let this be mine, with toil of hands
And heart and brain to make it true.

PROLOGUE

THE long August day was at its end, and a wind of delicate coolness had begun to blow. There had been a wonderful sunset, one of those magnificent blazonries of colour which happen rarely, and are remembered long by persons of sensitive perception. At what seemed the extreme edge of the world the sky had opened into a series of lakes, brimmed with green fire, into which cloud promontories thrust out purple bastions; above these rose a continent of mountains, topped with flame; still higher spread a firmament of pure saffron, on which crimson islands floated. As the sun sank lower winged splendours seemed to move across this strange cloud-world, the domes and spires of cities were disclosed; each caught the light an instant, and slowly disappeared, as if sucked down into the encroaching sea of emerald flame, which slowly overwhelmed them. The eye could distinctly trace the outlines of these sinking cities,—the colonnades, the aqueducts, the temples, the palaces,—and to the religious soul the strange spectacle suggested the

end of a world, as viewed by the secure hosts of God from some guarded eminence.

The people in the little Western town of Galesville had come out to look on this magnificence. Groups of white-dressed women filled the porches and piazzas; outside the hotel chairs were ranged along the sidewalk, and at the street corners groups of men stood, gazing toward the west. It was curious to note that all these men and women were silent. The only sound that broke the silence was the clanging monotony of a single bell that rang for worship, for it was Sunday evening.

Among those who sat outside the hotel was the Reverend Francis West, a New York minister, who on this particular Sunday completed the last day of his vacation. He had been camping for six weeks in the woods; from this happy solitude he had travelled three hundred miles to visit an old college friend, and by the perverse uncertainty of railroads had found himself stranded in this little Western town at midnight on the previous day.

Francis West was a typical product of his generation. He came of good New England stock, frugal, sturdy, and inclined to harshness. In course of time this original harshness of nature had been much modified by culture, and still more by the increasing opportunities of travel, which had given access to a broader world. But neither culture nor travel had

altered the original ground-work of character in his parents. Culture pared off the rough edges and gave surface polish, but the original qualities and veinings of the stone were the same. His parents after all remained New Englanders of the earlier type; shrewd, industrious, a trifle penurious, animated by Puritan ideals of duty, and deeply impregnated with the religious ideas of Jonathan Edwards and his school.

To Francis, however, there was given in his birth a certain element of lightness, not traceable to ancestry. I have called it lightness; but only for lack of a better word, for it was not levity, nor was it altogether gaiety; it was rather a certain sunniness of temperament, to which the heavy shadows cast by fate and destiny were abhorrent. He loved life for its own sake, whereas his parents always seemed to take life grudgingly. Had he chosen his course freely, he would have been a poet or an artist; but unfortunately for these high vocations he had no real aptitude. Moreover, in spite of this special lightness of temperament, he was fundamentally of a serious nature. Here ancestry asserted itself and was not to be ignored. It asserted itself with finality when he chose the Christian ministry for his vocation. It was a vocation that was inseparable from culture; it opened up a wide world of opportunity; it gave him a posi-

tion of authority. This he could foresee when he made his choice, and beyond this he saw little.

During the twelve years that he had been a minister he had had no reason to regret his choice. He had found in his vocation what he expected to find, and he had been successful from the worldly point of view. After a brief apprenticeship in a country pastorate he had become the minister of an influential church in New York, and in that trying position had acquitted himself with honour. He was now thirty-five, and his mind had reached maturity. But his characteristic lightness of temperament remained unchanged. He cared little for theology, disliked fanaticism of every kind, took life easily; his success had been due rather to gifts of intellect than of spirit. He was scholarly, eloquent, accomplished; and where such qualifications exist the modern ministry affords an admirable mode of life.

He rose from his chair, and stepped into the road, the better to behold the dying splendour of the sunset. It affected him strangely. He ransacked his fancy to discover images and analogies by which to express his thoughts. Among many passages from his favourite poets which thronged his memory, certain great passages of Scripture recurred. "And He shall come with clouds, and every eye shall see Him"—what a superb picture! Surely

it must have been on such a night as this that John conceived the vision—sunset on Patmos, and on the topmost clouds of glory, or emerging from flaming gateways along the level tract of sea, the majestic incomparable figure of the Lord! Certainly there was a strange power in the brief magnificence of sunset to make eternity seem real and near. It was as though the whole world waited for something, as though the finger of a great Awe were laid upon its babbling lips and hurried pulses. Something of that Awe possessed him for an instant, and he shivered.

The monotonous bell still rang for worship. Suddenly he decided that he would go to church. He would no doubt hear some preacher who could teach him nothing, but after six weeks in the woods there was something pleasant in the thought of sacred hymns, and all the sweet decorum of congregated worship. He strolled slowly up the street, reluctant to miss the last throb of coloured flame in the fading west.

The church was plain and simple, an auditorium rather than a church. He took his seat near the door, joined in the singing of the hymns, and presently found himself observing the preacher with some curiosity.

Certainly the preacher presented a curious appearance. He was unusually tall and gaunt, his

face was deeply lined, his hair was grizzled; but his chief attribute was a certain tenseness of attitude which at first seemed half grotesque, and then wholly impressive. When he spoke his voice was tense, too; a voice without the least musical quality, but full of strange vibrations. He seemed to shoot his words out like arrows from a twanging bow, and after each sentence he paused to notice the effect.

“And He shall come with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him,” said the preacher, in accents of profound conviction. West was startled at this quotation of the very words which had been in his own mind as he watched the sunset, and again he shivered. He found himself suddenly listening with incredible intentness, and he noticed the same intentness in others. The congregation was sparse—about a hundred persons in all,—and in the beginning of the service their attitude was languid. But this languor was of short duration. The tense vibrating voice of the preacher affected others as it had already affected West. From the moment that the text was announced there was breathless silence; men and women bent forward and dull faces grew bright; so still was the church that every tiny gust of wind was distinctly audible in its passage through the trees at the corner of the neighbouring square.

This sound of the wind seemed to add solemnity to the hour. It was as though the earth breathed in her sleep, as though the sighs of all the heavy-laden souls of all the centuries made the air pregnant with confession.

The sermon was both plain and brief, and West wondered what secret power made it so impressive. For it had power in spite of its plainness, in spite even of the grotesque manners of the preacher. Grace of diction it had not, nor novelty of idea, nor indeed any of those qualities which men usually associate with successful pulpit oratory: but it was, nevertheless, the sermon of a man who had thought much and felt deeply. The high tense voice quivered from time to time; the homely face became irradiated; the plain sentences were surcharged with personality. The theme was the evils of the world, and the faithlessness of the modern Church.

As the discourse neared its close a new note of passion vibrated in the voice of the preacher.

"You will complain that this is a gloomy view of the world," he said, "but for my own part it does not produce gloom in me. Why not? Because I know that Christ is coming again to set all things right, and I expect to see Him at any moment. I see the world full of folly, cruelty, and vice, men warring against each other, and nation warring

against nation, but I also see the signs of His appearing. For many years I have prayed each night for His coming, and have slept in the great hope that He would come before the morning broke. That He will come again is certain—He has promised it. That He may come at any moment is obvious, though we know not the time nor the season. I expect to see Him with these human eyes. It would not surprise me if He came to-night. And, O, the rapture of those souls who are found watching and waiting, when at last His feet are heard along the road, and His hand is on the door! A thousand years of wakefulness and tears and agonised desire were but a light price to pay for that joyous moment. Yes, He comes. Through all the confusion of the world I hear the midnight cry, ‘Behold the Bridegroom cometh.’ The world and the Church have alike forgotten His promise, but He has not forgotten it. He will come, and He will come not through thoughts and ideas as some men hold, but visibly—yes, visibly, mark—‘for behold He cometh with clouds, and *every eye shall see Him*, and they also that pierced Him, and all nations of the earth shall wail because of Him.’ ”

The preacher stopped, his face illumined, his arms lifted up as if to greet his descending Master. Then he said quietly: “ We will not close this service with a hymn as is customary. I do not know any hymn

that we could sing with entire sincerity at this moment. Let us rather go home in silence."

He bowed his head, and the congregation bent forward in prayer. In the deep silence the sighing of the wind was again audible—there was no other sound. Then he uttered one brief phrase which served as benediction and dismissal. In a low voice, strangely softened, which seemed to mingle with the sound of the wind and to be a part of it, he said, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

The people left the Church in quiet groups, and there was little of that interchange of friendly gossip in the vestibule which was customary. West approached one of these groups and asked the name of the preacher. It seemed that he was a professor in a small theological college of the South, doing supply duty for the pastor, who was on his vacation. A moment later the Professor himself came down the aisle and West introduced himself to him.

"I would like to have a talk with you," said West, "if you are not engaged. Won't you walk with me to my hotel?"

The Professor bowed stiffly, and the two men strolled slowly down the street. Some last embers of the sunset still burned in the west, as though a torch had been thrown down, scattering scarlet blots of flame along the sky-line. They walked in silence for a time, but West's thoughts were busy.

What manner of man was this strange preacher? West glanced at the stern lined face, feeling instinctively that the man had a history. He felt that he would like to know that history; it might explain the man.

"Pardon me," said West, "but the name of your college is new to me. I don't seem to have heard of it."

"Very likely not," said the Professor. "The name was new to me three years ago."

"Then you have not long been a Professor?"

"O, no; I have had three churches, and from each I was dismissed."

"Dismissed?" said West. "Surely that was hard lines. How did that happen?"

"Because my preaching did not suit them, I suppose. They wanted me to prophesy smooth things, as do most of the churches nowadays. I was unable to meet their wishes. That is the entire story."

He smiled grimly, and West knew how some of those deep lines had come upon the stern face. He reflected that there was no harder tragedy than that of the minister who does not succeed. Such defeats might well leave furrows on the brow, and might also fill the heart and memory with bitterness. But the curious thing was that the man spoke without the least bitterness, without resentment,

with entire calmness indeed, as though the whole affair were of no importance.

"You do not seem to make a trouble of it," said West.

"Why should I?" he replied. "I was troubled greatly for the people I left, but for myself—no. I know that my steps have been surely ordered in the eternal councils from the beginning, and that this was part of the predetermined way. I know also that neither success nor defeat count for anything, because each is brief and transient. When Christ comes the one thing that counts will be to be found ready."

"Ah!" said West. "I am afraid at this point we are not in entire agreement. I gather that you really believe in the immediate personal second coming of Christ."

"And don't you?"

"Not in your sense of the term."

"Yet the terms are so clear that dispute is impossible," replied the Professor. "'Behold, He cometh with clouds, and *every eye shall see Him*,'* what can that mean but that it is the visible coming of one who is a person—that indeed the second coming is as actual as the first? But I know what you think—it is the way in which most men, yes, and most ministers, think to-day. You say He has come already in the spread of Christian ideas; why

don't you say that His reported earthly life is merely a legend invented to express the same ideas? The one mode of thought is as reasonable as the other. For my part, I am unable to juggle with plain words. I believe in a second coming because it is distinctly promised, and moreover, I believe that coming to be imminent."

West shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He began to regret that he had sought an interview with a man who was, after all, nothing but a common crank. As for himself, he had long been engaged in preaching what he called a rational Christianity, which in plain language meant only those elements of Christianity which could be harmonised with reason. Most of the preachers he knew took the same view of their vocation. To reach the minds of intelligent men to-day it was necessary to separate the ethical elements of Christianity from the legendary and so-called supernatural elements. His mind had been so long engaged in this task that he had taken it for granted that no other view of Christianity was possible. And now he was face to face with a man who actually lived in hourly expectation of a second miraculous coming of Christ to earth, for it was impossible to doubt the man's sincerity. And the man was not unintelligent—his sermon had declared unusual qualities of mind. Well, he reflected, human nature was a queer med-

ley, and the human mind a queer jumble of reason and superstition. He began to feel a rising disdain for this man, whose religion appeared to rest upon the crudest kind of literalism, and he commiserated the students who came to him for instruction.

But the Professor was serenely unconscious of his disdain and pity. Once started upon his favourite theme, he poured out his soul without stint. He spoke of this and that sign of the times, long foretold; he quoted the vehement words of Christ and His Apostles; and as he spoke his face kindled with sublime conviction. West listened in silence, interested in the man rather than in his views. And yet, in spite of all his incredulity, from time to time something the Professor said pierced his mind with a flash of fire. What if he were right, after all? It was ridiculous to assume so much, but, granting the assumption, West saw that it was a truly sublime vision that the man beheld. And, after all, many had believed it—the Apostles themselves, for example; the early Christians, the Puritans, the Pilgrim Fathers, his own ancestors, and, for that matter his own parents. He recollected how he had many times heard the old minister in the New England village where he was born pray that Christ would “hasten His coming.” He remembered an old aunt of his, a white-haired, godly woman with a face of great tranquillity, who used to say each

night as she went to bed that her soul was prepared to meet the Lord if He came before the morning. Ah, that was the pathos of it—all these tired eyes wearied out with fruitless gazing for a Lord who never came! And yet what dignity the thought, the delusion if so it was, gave to their lives! How firmly they moved along the hard ways of duty, undismayed alike by sorrow or catastrophe, because they expected One to come who should make all things right, all things new, visibly reconciling all things to Himself! Yes, it was a great belief—if only it were believable—if only it were!

The Professor had risen from his chair.

"I can tell you," he was saying, "why men try to explain away the second coming of Christ. It is because they are afraid to believe it, and, therefore, do not wish to believe it. They do not *want* Christ to come. The Church itself does not want Him. The mere thought produces alarm, terror. But, nevertheless, the word stands sure, 'Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him.' Good-night, sir, we shall possibly never meet again, but remember my words: your eyes and mine will surely see the Lord once more moving through the world He has redeemed; yes, we shall see Him as He is."

The Professor shook hands, and went swiftly up the street. It seemed to West that there was a spirit

of elation even in his footsteps; and West almost envied him his faith. For, confessedly, there was no such spirit of elation in his own life. He did his duty with fidelity, but sometimes with undisguised weariness, and with the growing sense of something futile in his ministry. Sometimes, and especially of late, he had felt that it did not much matter what he taught his congregation, since all he taught had so little visible effect upon their lives. The good remained good, the kindly remained kindly, the selfish remained selfish; ah, it needed more than the wisest teaching to effect any radical alteration in these lives. What was needed was surely the vitalising power of some new emotion; and this power he well knew he could not supply. Suddenly he saw that this man whom he had disdained had the power. It was evident that his entire character was vitalised by a strong emotion—the conviction of the imminent coming of Christ, and that he was capable of communicating this emotion to others. Was this, after all, the lost dynamic of the preacher and the Church? He smiled at the question, and yet he could not silence it.

The street was now empty. The cool dusk had closed down over everything. In the high dome of sky the stars hung, faintly visible, and a pale light still lingered in the west. He rose and went to bed; but before he slept he stood a long time at the

window, looking on the silent sky. He was conscious of a certain softening of heart as he reflected on the events of the evening. His thought went back to the distant past, and the collective memory of his race stirred in him.

"They believed it all," he thought, "and they were the better and the wiser for their belief. Am I the better or wiser for my unbelief? No belief can be wholly false that produces heroic lives."

He remembered with singular distinctness the old minister of his boyhood with his constant prayer, "Lord, hasten Thy coming." The old man had had many trials; He was finally left widowed and childless; but he never lost his serenity of aspect, and as he grew older this became a sort of majestic tranquillity. The prayer so often uttered in his ministry was his dying prayer also. The old man had been heard uttering the petition in the night. In the morning they had found him dead, kneeling against a window that opened to the east, perhaps with his last earthly gaze scanning the illumined clouds of morning for the flash of his Lord's approaching chariot wheels. And as West remembered these things the question arose in him, could he, or dare he, use this prayer?

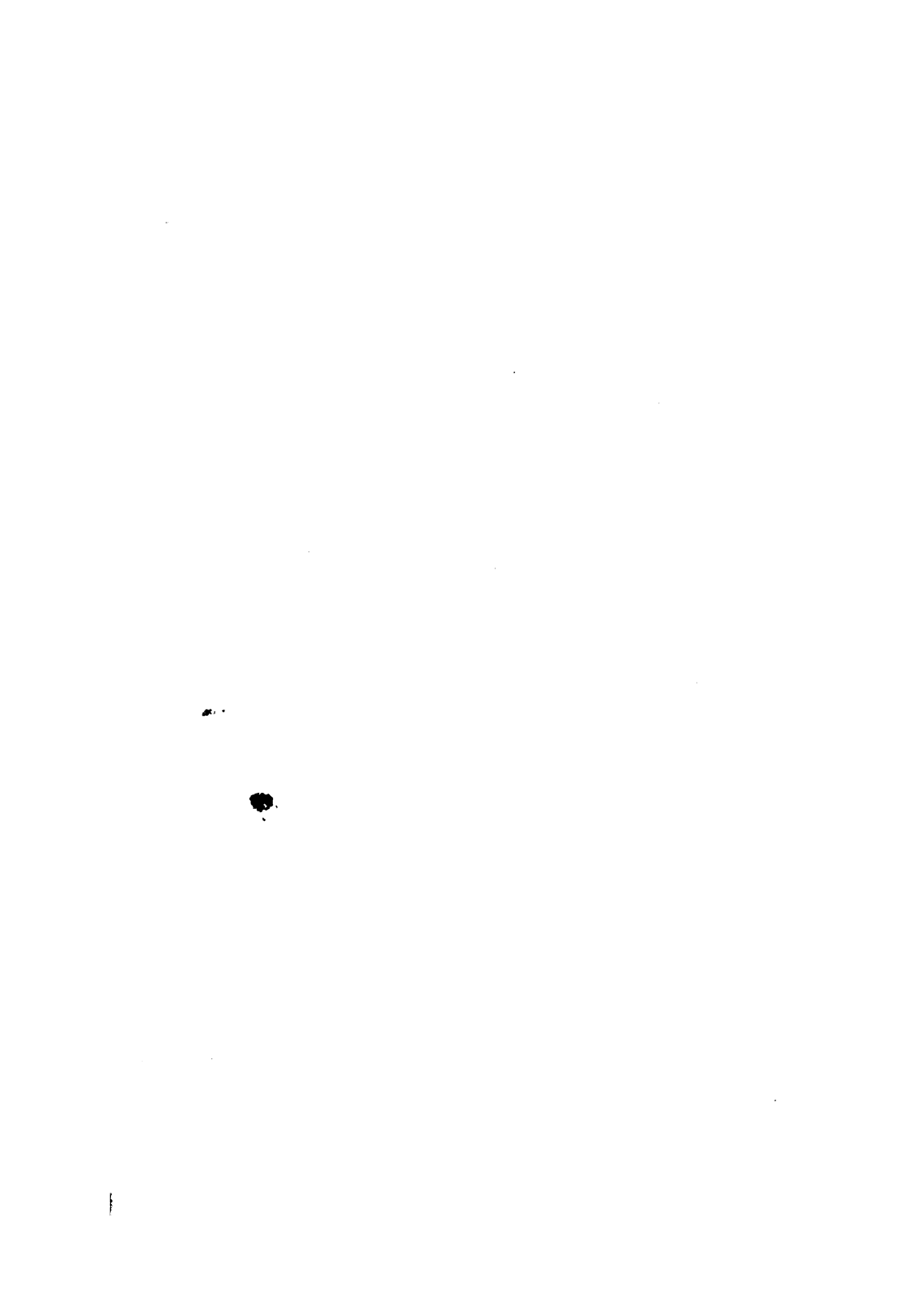
"Lord, hasten Thy coming."

The words came from his lips in a whisper. A great awe fell upon his spirit. It was as though

something had spoken in him which was himself, and yet not himself; the ancestral soul, as it were, the voice of his race, triumphing over the accidents of his personality.

Memories of the past, the picture of the overwhelming sunset he had seen, echoes of the voice of the strange man with whom he had conversed, all floated through his mind in confused impressions; and through all the words of the preacher throbbed like the pulse of the sea, "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him."

Then he fell asleep, and dreamed a dream.



I

THE GHOST CORNER

HE sat in the smoking-room of the Veritas Club in New York. The club rented the top floor of a lofty building which had only just missed the distinction of being a famous sky-scraper. From the window of the club an almost appalling, certainly a most impressive, view of New York was visible. On every side stretched the long monotonous streets, like the stony gullies or mountain canyons of Colorado: here a dome was thrust up, here a spire, here a sky-daring mass of masonry, suggesting the rocky buttresses and pinnacles of a wild gorge; from the depth beneath came not the sound of rushing waters, but the roar of the stream of life in its ceaseless torrent; far to the eastward a web of steel spanned the sky, and the masts of ships appeared. The sky was clear, unstained by smoke; from the roofs of these vast towers rose plumes of white steam, like fragments of white clouds. There was something Titanic in the scene; it was hard to believe that it was the creation of the

tiny creatures that swarmed like black ants far below. It possessed no element of beauty, it lacked charm; but it was immensely impressive as the creation of human will and energy. It was the apotheosis of materialism, the visible triumph of the utilitarian mind; no poet's thought breathed at any point in that hard mass of glittering surfaces, and it was not easy to imagine the existence of any poetic sentiments in the people who inhabited these rectangular abysses.

West glanced carelessly at the prospect from the open window; he had seen it too often to be allured by it. He had just lunched, and was turning over the papers which lay upon the club table. The members of the club were slowly assembling.

The Veritas Club had one distinction, it consisted for the most part of men of living minds. Its members were writers, thinkers, the higher class of journalists; West was the only clergyman. It prided itself on its exclusiveness.

Rathbone, a rising novelist and magazine editor, had just entered the room; close behind him came Field, a famous surgeon, and Stockmar, a philosophic writer who had already attained notoriety, and intended one day to achieve fame. Of these men Stockmar possessed the most trenchant personality. He was a big man, whose heavy form and features betrayed his Teutonic origin. He had be-

come notorious by his attacks upon the existing social system. It would have been difficult to say exactly what he believed, but his unbeliefs were numerous and militant. How far he was sincere in his wholesale iconoclasm was a question, but there could be no doubt of his great ability. He both spoke and wrote in a style of trenchant exaggeration, which he had purposely adopted to attract attention; but behind a rhetoric which was as daring as it was brilliant there lay a vast scholarship which made him a formidable antagonist. Very few men in the club ever dared to cross controversial swords with him. They found it safer and much pleasanter to stimulate him to the point of speech, and then dutifully listen to his brilliant monologues.

"Well, West, anything in the papers?" said Rathbone carelessly.

"Nothing but the usual trivialities," said West. "It fills me with wonder that you writing fellows can't turn out a paper that rises above the baldest provincialism."

"What sort of paper do you want?" said Rathbone.

"A paper with the world-note in it."

"And what precisely does that mean?"

"A paper that really gives a vision of the world as a whole. There's no American paper which does

that. I suppose it is because there is no real standard for anything in America, neither critically, socially, nor intellectually. The result in journalism is that little things are clothed with absurd values, and the papers are filled with elaborate trivialities of not the least importance to any one."

"I'm not so sure of that," interrupted the deep voice of Stockmar. "Here's a telegram from Rome which doesn't strike me as trivial at all. It seems that the Pope has condemned as heretical and forbidden about forty propositions in Biblical criticism, thirty at least of which are accepted by all capable and even orthodox scholars. Here's a further telegram to the effect that the Roman populace stoned and nearly killed a Cardinal in the streets yesterday. How's that for a world view? Why, it presents the most superb spectacle imaginable—an empire of lies which has long masqueraded as religion sinking in the red waves of rising democracy."

"It's not quite sunk yet, anyway," said West. "Religion, even when mixed with falsehood, is an inextinguishable instinct in man."

"Cannibalism was an inextinguishable instinct once," retorted Stockmar, "but it's gone. It went when men found it inconvenient, and in the long run men will always rid themselves of the inconvenient."

That's why religion is bound to go. It is in the way. Therefore modern progress will destroy it."

"Here, Stockmar, listen," said Field. "Here's another curious telegram for you to digest. The paper states that there's some sort of strange Russian sect in Canada who have started out to find Christ, who they believe is to appear shortly in the flesh. In Canada, mind you; where one might suppose men would have enough to do to tame the wilderness, and build an empire. What do you make of that?"

"Simply that a certain number of the human race are always insane. These people are insane," said Stockmar.

"That won't do," replied the surgeon. "You will find individuals insane, but you don't find insane communities."

"Don't you?" retorted Stockmar. "Why, religion itself is an insanity, and whole communities suffer from it. To believe the incredible is certainly insane, and all the religions of the world rest upon the incredible."

"Christianity included?" said West.

"Christianity preëminently," replied Stockmar.

"I wish you'd tell us what your real thoughts about Christianity are," said Rathbone.

The big man wheeled his chair nearer to his three listeners, and lit a cigar with cool deliberation.

"I've no objection," he said, "if West has none."

"I cultivate curiosity as a means of knowledge," said West, with a smile. "Pray proceed."

"Curiosity as a means of knowledge?" replied Stockmar. "I wonder just how far the curiosity of the ordinary man will carry him. I've never found that it is prepared to go to the root of things. As soon as it comes to a dark corner it sees ghosts and runs away. Especially in matters of religion. Your most liberal theologians are a case in point. They march out with a mighty flourish of courage, but they soon see the ghost, and run back to the shelter of a pseudo-orthodoxy. Now I'm like Coleridge, I've seen too many ghosts to believe in them. I've got past the ghost-corner, and found it really empty after all. 'Which things are an allegory,' as Paul said; and if Paul had had more moments of redeeming sanity he would have passed the same verdict on about nine-tenths of his own writings."

He paused, shook the ash from his cigar, and plunged into one of those monologues for which he was remarkable.

His views were not novel, but they were expressed with a force of phrase that gave them an air of originality. Christianity, he asserted, was simply the growth of an exquisite legend, which, like all legends, was scientifically false. It grew up in an

age when legend passed for history. It found its germ-cell in a life of more than usual significance, and straightway proceeded to graft upon the simple human details of that life every kind of legend which had hitherto belonged to poetry and mythology. The gods were believed to mingle with men: therefore Jesus came to earth by a special incarnation. The gods returned to heaven at will: therefore Jesus re-ascended to the skies. The gods were invulnerable to death: therefore Jesus rose from the dead. The Greeks also had their legend of Hercules in Hades, and the Egyptians their yet more wonderful story of Osiris. But in this age legend no longer passed for history, and the result was that the story of Jesus had been more and more forced back into the limits of the human.

"Ah," interrupted Field, "but what are the limits of the human? For my own part, I should hesitate to define them."

"I should have supposed them tolerably plain," sneered Stockmar. "Birth, life, death,—add the details according to taste, struggle, folly, regret, and so forth,—and you have the brief compendium of man through all the ages."

"And no ghost-corners in human nature, of course?" Field replied. "No inexplicable elements? I don't agree in your diagnosis, Stockmar."

"And why not?"

"Because I have found out the ghost-corners in man," Field quietly replied.

Field was as a rule a quiet man, who rarely took part in the discussions of the club. He presented the strongest contrast to Stockmar, both physically and mentally. He was slight in form, alert in movement, his face was thin and worn, his mouth firm but kind, his eyes inscrutable. At thirty he had begun to be known for his great skill and daring, and at forty he was famous. He was not widely read outside the scholarship of his profession, but within those limits he might have been justly described as learned. His daily life was too crowded with practical details to allow him much opportunity for speculative thought, but, nevertheless, he was a man whose mind brooded much over the problems of human personality. What his conclusions were he had never stated; perhaps he had reached none. But he had often expressed his dissent from Stockmar's glib materialism; he was at least aware of a mystery in life for which Stockmar had no elucidation, and as he grew older his sense of the mystery of life deepened. He dissented now.

"Yes, there are ghost-corners in human nature," he quietly resumed, "for which you make no allowance. Have you ever seen a man die, Stockmar? I have seen hundreds, and in a large proportion—ninety per cent. I should say—there has been some—

thing to convince me that the potency which is in man is not exhausted by your terms of birth, life, and death. Death has again and again impressed upon me the phenomenon of escaping spirituality. That is what I call the ghost-corner in human nature. I have gone through the physical house of life thoroughly; I have entered every room, unlocked every door; I have let in the garish light on every secret. And then I have come at last upon a door I could not open, behind which moved a vital creature unintelligible to me. I have heard its cries, its baffled movements, its struggle for liberation, and I have been afraid. Yes, afraid, Stockmar. For this concealed creature appeared incapable of death, and I have figured it to myself as something bright and vital that comes forth free in the instant of dissolution, mocking the poor habitation it had left, triumphing over it."

"Dreams, mere dreams," growled Stockmar.

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of," Field retorted.

"Arrant nonsense, then," said Stockmar.

"You may call it so, I do not," said Field. "And because I do not, your account of Christianity appears to me to be lacking in intelligence. Why have all nations had their legends of men descending from the skies, and returning to them? Because they have been dimly aware that man himself

has descended from the skies, and returns to them—at least some essential element in man. The legend has become credible only because it has been based upon some real perception which man has found true. Why have crowded centuries of men believed in the victory of Jesus over death, and of His subsequent resurrection? Because they felt it *ought* to be true—its truth was the affirmation of some element in man which man found credible. I am no theologian; I fear I am not even a Christian; but I affirm that to me, as a surgeon, there is nothing incredible in the idea of Jesus rising from the dead, and therefore of His being actually alive at this hour.”

The brief afternoon light was fading, and the four men had drawn closer together, the better to see each other's faces. The discussion which had commenced in Stockmar's display of somewhat theatrical rhetoric, had gradually deepened into profound seriousness. It was as though an abyss had slowly opened at their feet. West was pale; Rathbone listened with strained attention; from the inscrutable eyes of Field it was as though a veil had been withdrawn, leaving visible two wells of eager light. Stockmar alone showed no sign of emotion, beyond a certain flush of rising anger and disdain.

He broke into a loud scornful laugh as Field affirmed his belief in a Jesus who was alive.

“Give me a single proved instance of a man who has survived death, and I may believe you,” he cried. “But you know you cannot. There has never yet been a ghost-story that could survive strict examination. And this precious farrago of incredibilities which men call Christianity is all based upon a ghost-story. O, it is the cleverest of ghost-stories,—I don’t deny that,—but it bears the marks of its origin in every feature. An hysteric woman, notably deranged, thinks she sees a human figure in the elusive lights and shadows of a garden, and straightway says, ‘It is my Master.’ Two men, overwrought by the strain of a great tragedy, are overtaken on a lonely road by a stranger whose face they cannot see, for it is night, and they at once jump to the conclusion it is their lost friend. Even the woman is so far from sure in her belief that she supposes for a moment that the figure she sees in the shadow of the trees is the gardener. And the men, in the same way, talk for an hour or more with their companion on the road, and never for an instant suspect his identity. It is from first to last a case of mental suggestion. They want to believe that Jesus is not dead, and the wish begets the vision. And then, to crown all, you have a company of these excited people sitting in the dusk of a silent room—and the door opens mysteriously, and a wind blows over them, and they cry,

'It is the Lord.' The door opens mysteriously, and a wind blows over them—a wind—blows——"

He repeated the words thrice, each time more slowly, as if he had some difficulty of articulation.

His face flushed, and then grew pale. "My God!" he groaned. "What's this?" He grasped the arms of his chair, leaning forward, his eyes wide and staring.

"The door opens—a wind blows——" he repeated again. His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper.

Field sprang forward, and laid his hand on Stockmar's shoulder.

"Stockmar!" he cried, "you are ill. What's the matter?"

Stockmar did not answer. His great bulk seemed suddenly to have shrank within itself. His blue eyes dilated in that same dreadful stare.

"Ah, the ghost-corner," he whispered hoarsely. "And a wind blew——" His eyes closed, and he became rigid.

"Field, what is it? What has happened?" cried West wildly.

"It looks like aphasia," said Field. "Aphasia, and something more."

For the words had suddenly vanished from Stockmar's lips, as though a sponge had passed over them. It was as if a band had broken in some

intricate machinery; the wheels whirled for a moment, moved more slowly, and at last stood still. What had stopped those wheels? Rathbone and West stood silent with a sense of horror. It was so sudden, so terrible; this instant separation of the thinking brain from the speaking lips,—this groping after language, this pitiful futile effort, this relapse of the mature brain into the empty incoherences of infancy.

And in each mind there stirred another thought which neither could express—a thought almost formless, but yet intensely vivid. What had those staring eyes beheld? Was it what Mary saw in the garden? what the disciples saw in the upper room? For they saw something. And it was what they saw that had paralysed that brilliant, mocking tongue.

Field was still stooping over the stricken man, in whom signs of consciousness were reappearing. He slowly opened his eyes, and with a great effort rose from his chair. His face was tragic, his hands tremulous. He looked from one to another with a gaze that had lost all its cheerful effrontery. It was perplexed, pleading, almost wistful.

“Did any of you fellows play me a trick?” he said slowly.

They each denied in turn.

“Then it must have been THAT. O, my God!”

He shuddered violently.

"Come," said Field cheerfully, "let me take you home. You've had a shaking, but no doubt you'll be all right to-morrow."

But the great surgeon's face belied his words.

"A shaking—yes," Stockmar said. "But it's gone deeper than you think, Doctor. O, my God, how deep it has gone! No, I'll go alone. I must go alone. Come around later in the evening to see me, but at present I must be alone."

He left the room, amid the anxious silence of his friends. When he had gone, West and Rathbone looked at each other in bewildered surmise. They turned instinctively to the great surgeon.

"What does it all mean?" they asked again.

"That is more than I can tell you," said Field. "But I have my guess: you have yours. We probably think alike. It's a guess too awful, yes, and too sacred for words."

They knew what he meant.

"I think Stockmar has had his lesson," he said gravely. "And for that matter so have we. God help us each to be the wiser for it. I don't know how you feel, but for me this is a supreme moment, and, like poor Stockmar, I crave to be alone."

"And I, too," said Rathbone.

"And I," said West.

They separated without another word.

II

WHAT IS TRUTH?

WEST walked rapidly to his church, unlocked the side-door, and entered his study. He switched on the electric light with an unsteady hand, and flung himself into his arm-chair. The church was absolutely empty and silent; Sturgess, the janitor, had gone home to supper. But to West's excited nerves the silence was alive with muffled sounds. The air throbbed, whispers and murmurs ran along the walls, footsteps stirred in the dark passages, and he thought with a kind of terror of the vast empty auditorium. He rose from his chair and looked into that well of lonely space. A dim light pervaded it, a sort of velvet dusk. He persuaded himself that he heard the rustling of dresses, the soft creak of shoes, the low breathing of an unseen crowd, and he found himself staring fixedly at the obscure organ loft, as if anticipating the music of some soundless voluntary. Then he fled, closing and locking the door behind him, and once more sank into his chair.

"My nerves are badly shaken by that affair of

Stockmar's," he thought. "No wonder, for it was horrible."

The more he thought of it, the more thoroughly did the whole scene possess his mind. He tortured his reason to find explanations for it, but he found none that were satisfactory. "Aphasia—and something more," Field had said; what was this "something more"? Of all men Field was the last who could be accused of credulity or hysteria. Yet it was clear that Feld suspected, and practically affirmed, the existence of some strange cause for Stockmar's illness which lay beyond the physical. Field had spoken of a guess at the truth, which each witness of the scene had shared, and West well knew the nature of that unspeakable conjecture. But he dared not define it. It was a thing too fantastic, too wildly incredible; even Field had not attempted its definition. An icy thrill ran through his blood, a flash of fire followed, and the sweat stood upon his brow. With a violent effort he thrust the whole scene from him, drew his chair to his writing-table, and began to deal with the papers that lay upon it.

There was much to be done, for the next day was Sunday, and West had let the week drift away in trivial duties. The notes of his sermon lay unfinished on his desk, offering a silent challenge to his distracted mind. He had counted on these quiet

hours for the completion of his task, and he now resolutely bent his will to his duty.

Half an hour passed in silence; then he sighed heavily and laid down his pen. He had written nothing; he could write nothing. There had been a good deal of discussion of late on what was called the New Theology, and he had intended to deliver a sermon the next morning on its most important phases, to which he was prepared to give a qualified support. But as he reviewed his theme, it seemed singularly barren. He now felt for it an unaccountable distaste, which amounted almost to repugnance.

He heard the outer door open; a moment later the janitor appeared, bringing with him the printed forms of service for the approaching Sabbath. West had been proud, and as he thought justly proud, of the perfection to which he had brought the form of service in his church. When he had first come to the church the form of service had been plain to baldness, but he had changed all that. His artistic taste demanded beauty in worship, and he soon imposed his ideals upon a not unwilling congregation. He secured what he believed was the finest quartette in the city; he laboured with them for musical perfection; and the result was certainly one of the most elaborate concert performances in any church of New York. His sermons had gradually

assimilated this new atmosphere. They were passages of music, eloquent, polished, exquisitely balanced. They excited admiration, they attracted persons of taste, and with these results he was satisfied. Another result which he had not noticed, or was but dimly aware of, was that nearly all the elements of positive teaching in his ministry had been dissolved or greatly attenuated. Perhaps they were not keenly missed by the congregation he had gathered. Here and there might have been found some old white-haired member of the church, the forlorn relic of an earlier dispensation, who looked up and was not fed; but the great majority was satisfied. For the great majority was composed of persons for whom worship was a kind of pleasure; persons not at all inquisitive about truth, mildly intellectual, feebly equipped with spiritual perception; persons no doubt of virtue and kindliness, but quite mundane, who found in West's preaching a gentle excitement to propriety, and would have resented any attack on their complacency.

For a long time West had not only accepted these conditions, but had fostered them. But during the last two years there had come to him by slow degrees that sense of weariness and futility in his ministry which he had confessed to himself on that night when he heard the Galesville minister. The good remained good, the kindly remained kindly,

the selfish remained selfish—that was the perplexing fact which had begun to be acutely painful to him. That he should have reached such a stage of feeling was significant, though as yet he had not grasped this significance. But to-night, as he glanced over the Sunday's order of service, as he recollected with an inward shudder the strange scene in the Club, that significance was suddenly revealed to him.

Was this weekly service, with all its exquisite elaboration, a true expression of a Christian ministry? Was it not histrionic, a performance, missing the essential note of reality? It appealed to the senses, it gratified the æsthetic taste, but did it touch the soul? He knew that it did not, that it was scarcely meant to do so. There came to his memory the terrible and scornful words of Ezekiel, "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not." And sharper than that reproach was another which he dared not articulate; if the Christ who warred against the ancient materialism of the Church should enter this church, what would He say? With what eyes would He look upon this master of a pleasant voice, who soothed the people into inert complacency, fed upon their admiration, and spoke words not only which

they *did* not, but which they were scarcely expected to do?

"Is this what I really am? Is this what I have come to?" he thought.

He was roused from his painful reverie by the presence of the janitor.

The janitor, Sturgess, was an old man, with a venerable white head, ruddy cheeks, and watchful blue eyes, now slightly dimmed with years. He had entered on his office more than forty years before, when the first church was built; he had survived half a dozen ministries, and was still active. West had always had a strong liking for him, partly because he came from New England, partly because he bore in speech and manners a curious resemblance to West's own father. Certain terms of expression in the old man's speech vividly recalled the countryside where West had grown to youth; he had in full measure the characteristic New England gifts of shrewdness, reticence, and dry humour. He was unaffectedly devout, a connoisseur in sermons, and by no means unwilling to express his views when once the crust of his habitual reticence was broken through.

"Have you any further orders for me?" the old man enquired.

"I think not, Sturgess."

"I thought you looked kind of troubled, as if

something didn't please you. Is it the anthems as isn't right?"

"O, I believe they are right enough, Sturgess, but it's true they don't quite please me."

"They don't please me neither, if you'll let me say so. We used only to have one, and now there's two and sometimes three, and they're that long that by the time they're done the sermon don't get fair play, so to speak. When old Dr. Littleton was here, we used to have good hymns which every one could sing, and with all respect to your judgment, sir, it seems to me the service helped one more then than it do now."

"Ah, Sturgess," said West, with a smile, "you see you are rather old-fashioned."

"I've lived a long time," said the old man simply.

"And you don't really approve of me, do you? I quite sympathise with you, for I don't altogether approve of myself."

"O, I wouldn't say that, not by no means, sir. I've always thought you a very clever preacher, much cleverer than Dr. Littleton, who grew to be quite tedious before the end. But somehow things was warmer then, and the old doctor had a way of making you feel that what he said was true."

"And I don't? Eh, Sturgess?"

"Now I won't have words put in my mouth like

that. I didn't say that, and wouldn't have said it on no account. But when you've had all these anthems, and know that they that sung them ain't one of them a church member, nor cares for the essentials of religion, being just concert singers and no more, why, the sermon don't someway seem real—and it don't grip sometimes as I could wish. No doubt 'tis my fault, being an old man and not musical inclined, but since you've let me speak, why that's how I feel."

"It don't seem real"—the old man's words strangely coincided with West's own thought. And he knew instinctively that, though Sturgess had laid the entire blame of the unreality of the services on the music, this was not the whole of his thought. West's memory went back to the shingled meeting-house of his youth—just such a church as that in which Sturgess had been bred—with its atmosphere of silent earnestness, its crude but real devotion, above all its indomitable "essentials of religion." How often had he, as a boy, trembled under the appeals of long forgotten ministers from that homely pulpit! How had he learned to walk warily among what these vehement censors of life described as the diabolic traps and snares of the wicked world! There had been little tenderness in their preaching; too often they trod ruthlessly over the sensitiveness of young hearts. The God in whom they

believed was by no means amiable, the religion they presented was stern and formidable. But how tonic it was! What vigour of will it begot, what energy of virtue it developed in men and women! For it was undoubtedly a real religion, so real that it broke the soul into obedience to the great Task-master, produced agonies and raptures in its disciples, cast over all that bleak countryside the awful light of the eternal. West could still vividly recall some of those strong emotions; the sense he had of One who watched his slightest actions, and linked those actions with interminable destinies. He could still recall long periods, after some more than usually strenuous series of solemn sermons, when he walked across those fields in actual fear of an immediate judgment, pursued by the open eye of God. Then he had left home; he had passed into a larger world, where all beliefs sat lightly, and had soon found himself disdainful of what he called "the barbaric theology" of his youth. He had renounced it cheerfully, and without sense of loss. But now he was not so sure; above all he had begun to suspect that he had lost more than he knew in that unregretful renunciation.

"Yes, I suppose I *am* old-fashioned," the old man continued, "but you see, sir, as one gets older the things that happened long ago seem the clearest and the dearest. And I guess it's the same with

truths. The old truths come back with a new grip as you get near the grave."

"The old truths"—West did not need to ask what they were. But were they truths?—that was the point. A God watching every human creature with jealous eyes, a Son of God born into the world by supernatural processes, and pledged to return to the world to judge it finally; human life, even in its humblest form, thus invested with an atmosphere of sublime mystery and terror—how could any man of intelligence believe these things in this modern day? They were beliefs natural enough, credible enough, in an age which conceived the Earth as the one inhabited spot in the immense abysses of space and peopled by a race especially created to serve the spiritual experiment of an Almighty creator. But the heavens had now become astronomical, science had declared man no special creation, but the creature of a slow evolution from the lowest forms of life, who had needed thousands upon thousands of years to reach his present condition of development. And the restless intellectual curiosity which had pierced veil after veil in the dim arcana of nature, finding at each stage fresh proof of the relative insignificance of man and his world, had also discerned an alterable reign of law which made miraculous births, miraculous interferences of the unknown power which was

supposed to have created man, utterly impossible and even absurd. A man like Sturgess, plain, simple, and uneducated, might believe these venerable fables, and call them truths; they might even be helpful to him both as stimulus and restraint; but what meaning could they have to a trained intelligence?

And yet—these same “old truths” produced the noblest types of character—that was incontestable. And these modern truths—was it not evident that there was no power of stimulus or restraint in them, that they had, in fact, produced an infinite moral lassitude, so that the churches themselves were full of men and women in whom the spiritual sense was feeble, the moral temper without fervency or vigour?

West groaned under the burden of these thoughts.

Sturgess was about to leave the room. He looked wistfully at the perplexed minister, but said nothing.

West nodded a dismissal to the old man, and once more took up his pen. At the end of an hour, he put it down wearily, convinced at last that the theme he had intended to preach upon was worthless. Something like this had happened to him before, but it had never occasioned him such dismay. He had more than once had to change his theme at the last moment, but that was usually because some

more vital or seductive theme had suddenly seized upon his mind. But he recognised that this case was different—there was no new theme that thrust an old one out by its demand for utterance—rather there was a general sense that his entire world of thought had shifted, that its central pivot was lost, that he stood amid its ruins.

“God help me,” he groaned. “If I cannot believe either the old truth or the new, what is there left for me to preach?”

Once more there returned upon his memory the scene at the Club, and he was now no longer able to thrust it from him. It seized upon his startled mind with a strange vehemence; it obsessed him. What had Stockmar seen? Ah, *What?*

Late as it was, he resolved to visit Stockmar before he slept.

He went out into the street, caught a passing car, and found himself at the vast apartment house where Stockmar resided.

He found Stockmar sitting listlessly before an unlighted log-fire. A shaded lamp burned upon the library table; on the floor books lay in confusion; at Stockmar's side was an open Bible. The big man had recovered his colour, but upon his face there was a curious look of half-wistful hesitation, very different from his usual aspect of aggressive dogmatism. His manner, too, was singu-

larly quiet and almost humble. He motioned West to a chair, took his hand with eagerness, held it long; there was an element of appeal in the act which was touching.

"You are better?" said West.

"Physically, yes. But the trouble isn't physical, you know."

An awkward silence ensued. Stockmar, even in his weakness, was a formidable personality. West hesitated to disturb him with questions which might appear selfishly curious.

Stockmar himself broke the silence.

"I know why you have come," he said. "I have expected you. I think I know what you want to say. Please cut out the preliminaries. You want to know what lies behind my strange conduct at the Club, don't you?"

"Yes, that is it. I have a good reason."

"I'll take the reason for granted," he interrupted.

"West, you have known me for some years. Do you mind telling me quite frankly what kind of man I have appeared to you?"

"I have taken you for a strong man, Stockmar. Yes, I think that is the word which best describes my dominant impression. Strong in will and intellect, I mean—even perversely daring."

"And you have never known me tell a lie? O, I know that I am a somewhat histrionic person.

But you have never known me say what I did not at least believe, or merely act a part, or anything of that kind?"

"No, Stockmar, you are histrionic, but I believe you absolutely honest."

"Then listen to an honest man's confession, West. The bottom is knocked out of my philosophy."

"Since when?" said West, in an eager whisper.

"Since five o'clock this afternoon. That was the exact hour when my world fell to pieces."

"And why?" said West, in the same low whisper.

"Because at that hour the incredible became true. At that hour *I saw Jesus Christ!*"

West had expected the confession, but now that it was actually spoken it thrilled him with astonishment. His nerves tingled, his heart contracted in an acute spasm, his breath came in a hard gasp. Stockmar himself trembled violently as he spoke the words. He bent forward, hiding his face in his hands. When he looked up again, his face was haggard but composed.

"At five o'clock this afternoon," he repeated, "I saw Jesus Christ. Now listen, West. I have never had an attack of nerves in my life. As a youngster I went through the Franco-German War of 1870. I fought at Gravelotte, and lay in a wood for hours

scourged by French bullets. I don't remember that I was once afraid. I have never known what fear was. This afternoon I was afraid. O, my God, how afraid I was!"

Again a violent shudder seized him, and he wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Don't tell me anything further if it distresses you," said West.

"I must tell you," he replied. "I've told Field, I must tell you. It is not a thing to be concealed. I must tell everybody."

"Go on then," said West.

"You know me and the general character of my mind," he continued. "For nearly thirty years my passion has been for exact knowledge. I have banished from my mind, one by one, all beliefs that I considered unverifiable. Christianity, of course. I have warred against that in chief, because that seemed the worst kind of imposture. Once assume that man is only the most cultivated kind of animal, and the total rejection of Christianity must follow. That was my assumption, that was my deduction. West, I had proof to-day that man is greatly more than an animal. He can see and feel things no animal can see and feel. What I thought the solid walls of the universe, steadfast and imperishable, are only thin veils after all. I stepped through them suddenly into another world—West, man

doesn't die. He cannot die. There's a life beyond. I know it. I have breathed its air.

"And I saw Him—West, I saw Him. It was no phantasm of the mind. The Man I laughed at, the Man I had just said was dead—I saw Him coming towards me, His hands outstretched, His lips open in speech, His eyes full of love and reproach—and He laid His hand softly on my mouth, and His eyes pierced my soul—the soul I had denied. West, do you ever read your Bible? But I forgot, you are a clergyman—of course you do. Well, listen to this, will you?"

He drew the open Bible to his side, and read:

"'And Jesus came to them, and spake unto them, saying, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'

"'And when He had said these things, as they were looking, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they were looking steadfastly unto heaven as He went, behold two men stood beside them in white apparel, which also said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking unto heaven? This Jesus, which was received up from you unto heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven.'

"And to me He came, even to me—*this Jesus*."

"Stockmar, do you know what you are saying?" asked West, in a trembling voice. He was more

than thrilled with astonishment now: he was genuinely shocked.

The note of exaltation left Stockmar's voice at West's question.

"You doubt my sanity; is that it?" he replied. "Well, I don't wonder. I should certainly have doubted the sanity, or rather I should have had no doubts of the insanity, of any man who had made such a confession to me twenty-four hours ago. Yet I repeat that what I have told you is the actual truth. I go further, and say that the whole thing is intelligible, if you grant, as I do now, that man is more than matter. Granted some kind of spiritual personality in man, it is certain that from time to time that personality will find means of manifesting itself. And if this Jesus was man at his highest possible range of spiritual potency, as you will admit He was, it is certain that death would have no power to hinder His continual manifestations of spiritual personality to mankind. That is how I have argued it out to myself."

West felt that further conversation was impossible. What could he say? The impressive simplicity with which Stockmar had told his tale, the previous history of the man, the indubitable evidence of some utter revolution of thought which he presented—all this was overwhelming, and it silenced argument. Even in Stockmar's face there was

something that he had never seen before; it was not peace, though it was curiously allied to peace; it was rather a look of satisfaction, as of one who had reached the end of some vast experiment, a look of certitude through which alarm still struggled. . . . West could not define it, but he felt its reality, its impressiveness. The nearest approach to definition he could reach was that a soul now looked out of those keen eyes—a newborn soul. West had often seen intellect there; but this was different.

“Stockmar,” he said finally, as he rose to go, “I believe the bottom has dropped out of my philosophy, too. I am a miserable man. Whatever you have seen, I would give the world to see it, too.”

“You will,” said Stockmar, with a return to the exalted manner in which he had spoken while making his confession. “There’s a new atmosphere in the world. The barriers of materialism are dissolving. Don’t you feel it?”

“I feel it now, as I talk with you. But shall I feel it to-morrow?” he answered wistfully.

And with that word he went out into the night.

III

THE PICTURE

WEST made a shift to get through his morning service on the following Sunday, but it required an effort of which he was barely capable. He was conscious of both mental and moral lassitude. His manner, usually so bright and alert, was heavy and forced, and his speech was halting. He was sensitively aware of these defects. It was as though he possessed a double brain; the one engaged in positive action, the other in criticising this action with deliberate sarcasm.

He found himself also sensitive to impressions in a way that was quite new to him. Like most ministers of generous temperament, he had sedulously built up a belief in the superior virtue and intelligence of his congregation. For the relation of the minister to his people is very like the relation of a father to his child; he is silently aware of defects in the character of the people which he will not openly admit even to himself. His church may not be perfect, as the child is not per-

fect, but it is his own, and custom and affection make him blind to faults of which nevertheless he is uneasily conscious. But to-day it seemed to West that his entire perspective was sharpened. All the things which he had hidden under kindly veils of tolerance had become suddenly and painfully luminous. He was shocked at the palpable lack of sincerity in the performance of the quartette. During the long elaborate anthems he groaned in spirit, moved restlessly in his seat, and could not conceal his irritation. He was particularly irritated by the bass soloist, who put on the air of an operatic favourite, twisted his moustache with ostentatious coolness, and sung in a manner that invited applause.

West saw his congregation with the same critical and judging eye. All sorts of little incidents intruded themselves upon his notice—the manifest pride, for instance, of a certain group of young women in their apparel, the roving eyes of the youths, the heavy apathy of the older men. There was no spirit of solemnity, nor even of eagerness. The dominant characteristic of the congregation seemed a kind of wearied acquiescence; they had the aspect of people who watched without interest a stupid spectacle which had long ago become too stale for either praise or censure.

Things were hardly better when he began to preach, but this caused him no surprise, for he knew

himself incapable of preaching. Still he must go on for his allotted time, although he was abundantly conscious that no word he uttered was worth attention. Here and there he discerned an expression of polite surprise among the hearers, and in his rage against himself he almost wished that some one would rise and rebuke his incompetence. But of course nothing of the kind happened; his congregation, if they did not listen very closely, at least sat still, with the same air of wearied acquiescence, to the lame and halting end. And all the while, this malignant second brain of his ridiculed his efforts, and grinned in the face of his laborious rhetoric. Its final jibe was to recall to him an incident of his youth. He had preached somewhere in a little village church his best student sermon—it was a highly-coloured production on the subject of Belshazzar's feast—at the close of which an old lady shook his hand, and said with doubtful sincerity, "I wish to thank you, sir, for your *performance*."

"God help me," he thought. "That old lady was right. I was a performer after all; the only difference to-day is that I am not even an honest performer."

When he left the pulpit, amid the strains of the closing voluntary, it seemed as if the whole congregation suddenly became natural. The stilted doll-

like look of impassivity left their faces; they moved and talked as lively human creatures, and the church buzzed with the spirit of cordial intercourse. It was his custom to stand at the pulpit stair to shake hands with the people, and he did so now, though half-heartedly.

Among those who thus sought him was an elderly, bald-headed man, named Payson Hume. Hume was esteemed a man of joviality, because he had brusque manners and a hearty laugh; in reality these manners covered a narrow heart, an alert brain, and an unlimited faculty of stealthy greed. He was a broker in Wall Street, a good fellow to those who knew him casually; an unscrupulous Shylock to those who came within his clutches. West knew him only in his character of a good fellow. Payson Hume lived in good style, gave liberally to the church on occasion, and used his jovial manner to attach to himself people who might be useful to him in his business enterprises. To West he had been uniformly kind; and West had no reason to suppose that the adulation which he showered upon him was insincere.

"You look a bit played out," said Hume, in his friendliest manner. "No wonder after such a sermon."

West smiled grimly. In any one else he would have suspected irony, but not in Hume. Perhaps

also the compliment, gross as it was, was not altogether unwelcome. It was a soothing ointment to the hurt of his humiliation.

"I'm not altogether well," he said. "I slept badly last night."

"Come to lunch with me. You want cheering up a bit. Beside I have something to talk to you about which I think will interest you."

"You know my rule. I don't lunch out Sundays," said West.

"Not for once? Can't you make an exception? I see your wife waiting for you. Let me make it right with her."

Without any spoken permission Hume walked down the aisle, and engaged Mrs. West in conversation. In a few moments West joined them.

All at once it seemed to him that it would be a desirable thing to accept Hume's invitation. He was accustomed to talk over the service with his wife at the Sunday dinner; but there were good reasons why he should avoid such a conversation to-day. Helen West was a woman of warm affections, but an acute critic; she loved her husband, but her love had never silenced her critical faculty. There was, in fact, a certain disputatious element in her blood, the bequest of her New England ancestry. Her intellectuality, somewhat repressed by

the conditions of her life, found a vent in the discussion of her husband's teachings; and this habit was further stimulated by the genuine pride she felt in his ability. She had a horror of loose statements and loose rhetoric very unusual in a woman; she conceived it part of her duty as a wife to keep her husband up to the mark of fine pulpit performance. This was why West suddenly found Hume's invitation desirable. He knew he had failed lamentably this morning, and he was in no mood to submit to the gentle raillery of his wife.

"Mr. Hume is very anxious you should lunch with him," she said. "I have not the least objection. A little change in the monotonous order of things will perhaps do you good."

West cheerfully accepted the permission. Hume's automobile stood at the door, and in another moment the two men were being whirled along Fifth Avenue to Hume's house.

Hume's house was small and narrow, after the fashion of New York houses, but great skill had been exercised to procure the appearance of interior spaciousness. In his way—it was a very mercantile way—Hume was a lover of art, and every available inch of wall-space was covered by good pictures. Lately he had begun to purchase rare books, regarding them as a wise investment. His house had gradually acquired the appearance of a

small museum, and the surest way to his friendship was to admire his acquisitions.

The lunch was served immediately, and during its course the conversation turned chiefly upon some of the recent purchases Hume had made. West found himself expanding in this pleasant atmosphere; he forgot his humiliation and fatigue. He had a much more exact knowledge of art than Hume, and he found pleasure in communicating his knowledge to his host. The talk flowed on, and West found it delightful. What had become of that other world in which he had dwelt during the last twenty-four hours—that world of strange visions in which Stockmar moved like a terrible apparition, that world of strained emotion, in which he had done battle with so many alarming ideas? It had slowly sunk out of sight. He had exchanged it for a mundane world, whose atmosphere could be breathed without distress, whose light fell pleasantly upon a landscape where no ghosts hid. After all, the majority of men lived in such a world. Hume represented that majority. He had never grappled with an intellectual problem in his life, he had known nothing of the terror of solitary thought, he had moved along the somewhat garish path of his life without the least misgiving. And he had found the world a good place to live in. It had given him wealth, luxury, and many pleasant

occupations. Could he be counted unwise? Were not those the truly unwise who left the plain mundane path to penetrate the shadow-haunted verges of life, to perplex themselves over mysteries that were inscrutable, to grapple with the spectres of the mind? West's eye unconsciously absorbed the picture of this florid, jovial man, surrounded by things that pleased the taste, so manifestly sure of his wisdom, so at ease, so visibly successful, and he almost envied him. After all it was a folly to be righteous overmuch; perhaps it was a worse folly still to think overmuch on perilous and clouded problems.

His reverie was interrupted by the voice of Hume, who asked him abruptly, "Are you interested in gold?"

West laughed. "Most men are," he replied.

"But in gold mines," said Hume.

"I don't know that I am particularly," he replied. "I sometimes read astounding advertisements in the Sunday papers of mines which offer fabulous rewards for the investment of a few cents. I suppose the advertisers choose the Sunday papers because on that day men are so disgusted with the week's toil that they are the more ready to be cheated with the dream of wealth."

Hume ignored this pleasantry. He had been one

of these advertisers himself, though not in his own name.

"Well, I have a gold mine to promote," he said, with an air which was almost solemn. "It is a real mine, not a fake. It is a veritable mountain of gold. I have seen it. It was about this that I wished to talk with you. In these matters I always think of my friends first—it's a habit of mine,—and if you have any money to invest I can let you in on the ground floor."

West shook his head. "I have very little to invest—a sum so inconsiderable that you would laugh at it."

"No sum is inconsiderable," said Hume, with conviction. "In an affair like this the reward is so great that a very little money goes a long way."

He thereupon entered on a vivid description of his project. He drew pictures of the enormous mineral wealth that lay waiting for the tools of man in bleak mountains topped with everlasting snow. The Spaniards had been there, but they had only scratched the surface. Now, after three centuries, the treasures of which they took but a trivial toll, had been re-discovered. Before long the adventurers of three continents would be crowding to this new Eldorado. The whisper of gold had already gone forth, and it would soon travel round the globe. From those bleak mountains there would

flow forth a golden river, bringing with it luxury and ease to multitudes; for those who were first at the fountain-head would naturally be the greatest gainers.

West listened, fascinated in spite of his better judgment. At one point he interposed a question, "How did it happen that you got hold of this immense treasure?"

"O, that's a very easy proposition," said Hume, with a condescending smile. "There are a lot of small proprietors, who have been cutting into the mountain in a feeble way for years. They've become discouraged, and we've either bought them out or forced them out, one by one. You see, we've got knowledge, we've paid to get it. They are poor ignorant men. They can't stand up against us."

Then flashed before West's eyes a brief vision of these small proprietors—these poor ignorant men, toiling with sweat upon their brows, men with wives and families, doomed to eternal denial by this indomitable mountain, doomed finally to be driven back from the long-sought treasure by a power they could not resist. Somehow it did not seem quite fair. He felt he ought to protest against this unfairness. But he was swept from his resolve by the tide of Hume's eloquence. After all it seemed a natural process that Hume and his confederates, being strong, should prevail against the weak. That

was the law of the world; at least, everybody said it was. And a man could not very well be blamed for taking advantage of the plain law of the world in which he lived.

Could he not?

The room was hung with pictures, and at this point one small picture arrested West's attention. Among landscapes which breathed the poetry of nature, and figure pictures which displayed the gaiety of life, there hung this picture in its old tarnished frame—a single head, a pale face with deep challenging eyes, a mouth curved in a sad smile—a face at once sorrowful and majestic, calm but troubled, appealing as if in pain, yet triumphant as if in the possession of some immortal secret. The deep challenging eyes seemed to meet West's in wistful reproach. "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" they enquired. The words were almost audible.

Had the words indeed been spoken, the shock of surprise could not have been more terrifying.

With utter shame West realised the situation. Here was he, fresh from the pulpit, fresh from the overwhelming confession of Stockmar, passing the sacred Sabbath hours in the gross visions created by vulgar greed—listening with avidity to Payson Hume, with his doubtful schemes of wealth, even envying him his coarse use of life and his sordid

success. "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" And it seemed he could not, nor the Church of Christ either. For was not Payson Hume himself a fair representative of the modern Church? He was respectable and respected; he sat in the chief seats of the synagogue; he was esteemed generous, and his gifts were welcomed. Between him, a man of this world, rejoicing in his portion in this life, and that sad majestic face in its tarnished frame, what possible affinity existed? Nay, more, between this Man rejoicing in his noble poverty, and himself, Francis West, listening through the hours that should be sacred, to the seductive voice of Gold—what possible affinity?

He rose hastily, violently.

"You must excuse me. I must go," he said.

Hume looked at him in offended surprise.

"You're in a mighty hurry all at once," he said.

"Yes, I've—I've forgotten something," he replied.

He stood silent an instant before the picture, unable to withdraw his eyes from it.

"You seem curiously interested in that picture," said Hume. "For my part I don't value it a continental. I picked it up for a trifle, just for the sake of the frame. You see, sacred pictures don't fetch anything to-day. No one values them."

"No," said West slowly, "I suppose not. Noth-

ing sacred is valued much to-day—except for the frame.”

“Quite so,” said Hume cheerfully. “The frame’s the chief thing in pictures like that. Though I’ve sometimes thought that head was a pretty decent piece of colour.”

“Yes,” thought West bitterly, “that’s what it’s come to with us all. The frame and the colour, that’s all we value in Christianity. The Christ we see no more.”

But he did not utter his thought: he knew that it would be unintelligible to Payson Hume. He hurriedly left the house, with a bitterer sense of self-reproach than he had known in all his previous life.

The surprise of this strange Sabbath was not yet complete.

West preached again at night, and with even more humiliation to himself than he had felt in the morning. He saw the look of grieved surprise upon his wife’s face, and was aware of a coldly questioning look of scrutiny on many other faces. The moment the service was concluded he designed to leave the church, but it seemed there were more people than usual waiting to speak with him. One by one he dismissed them, till only one was left. He appeared to be a workingman of foreign extraction. He was dressed in clothes

which were much worn, but he bore himself with quiet manliness and dignity. As he stepped forward into the ring of light that shone from the pulpit, West noticed that his brow was high and pale, his eyes dark and questioning, his face the face of a thinker rather than an artisan.

"I wanted to ask you a few questions," he said, "if you'll let me, sir."

"What kind of questions?" said West. He imagined that the man was in need, probably of money, and he put his hand in his pocket for a coin.

"No, I don't want money," said the man. "What I want is knowledge."

"On what subject?" said West impatiently.

"About you, about this building, about the things that go on in it," said the man, with quiet dignity.

"Well, proceed," said West. "But please remember I am tired."

"I too am tired," he replied. "There are few people in the world more tired than I."

West looked at the man with new interest. Certainly he did look tired.

"If I can do anything for you——" he began. The man shook his head.

"No, I ask nothing for myself—nothing that you would be willing to give or I to take—at present," he said.

"This is why I wanted to see you," he resumed, "to ask you some questions. I have walked a long way to-day, and have been in many churches. Last of all I came to your church. I want to know what a church is for?"

"Why, to promote the spiritual good of the people," said West impatiently. He began now to be sure that the man was a crank, one of those persistent monomaniacs who wander in and out of churches to plague the minister with theological conundrums.

"And do you think it does this?" said the man. "Don't be impatient with me—I know you want me gone. But I have a reason for asking. I have been in many churches to-day, as I told you—last of all I came to yours. They all bear the name of Christ: I thought that I might find Christ in them. Do you know what I found?"

"No," said West curtly. "But most people find what they look for."

"Yes, that is true sometimes—beautifully true. To the pious heart I suppose all places are temples. But I don't mean that."

"Well, what then?" said West.

"I looked for Christ, or some one like Him, in the abodes that bear His name. He was poor, simple, humble, very loving. That is so, is it not? All the poor loved Him, because they knew that He

loved them. But this is what I found in these abodes that bear His name: no one at all like Him.

“I saw proud people in the pews, proud of dress and place, and a proud man in the pulpit, proud of knowledge; and the preacher spoke a special language which was not meant for the poor and humble. I heard fine music, and I heard people sing: but there was a look upon their faces that showed me that they knew not what they sang. One woman sang ‘He was despised and rejected of men,’ but there were no tears in her voice, and when she had done she smiled a light smile, and looked round for approval. I heard a whole congregation sing ‘All hail the power of Jesus’ name,’ but they sang without awe, with their lips only. No one spoke to me, some looked at me coldly, some contemptuously, for I am only a workingman. I did not mind that for myself, but I was sorry for them, because I saw that they had no compassion. And so all day this thought has troubled me; what are these churches really for? Why do they exist? What has Christ to do with them?”

“The churches have faults, but they do their best,” said West.

“But do they do the things they ought to do? The things Christ meant them to do? If Jesus came as I have come to-night, just a poor working-

man, which He was, you know, would these abodes that bear His name receive Him?"

The question was very softly uttered, but it seemed to thrill the air. The church was now empty, a few lights only burned, and the great building was full of shadows.

West looked keenly at the man, all his impatience now merged in curiosity. Who was he? Commonly dressed as he was, he did not speak like a common man. There was a curious mixture of humility and authority in his manner.

"Who are you?" West said.

He did not reply for some moments, but during those moments it seemed to West that some marvellous change happened to the man. Was it mere fancy—that face with the high pale forehead, the deep challenging eyes, how like it was to the picture he had seen in Hume's room that afternoon! And there was the same aspect of sorrow and secret triumph in the face—something inexplicably moving and reproachful.

"Francis West," the man said slowly, "if He came as I come, wouldst thou receive Him?"

The words died into a whisper. West had bowed his head instinctively.

When he looked up the man was gone, the church was empty.

IV

THE QUESTION

WEST slept badly that night, and arose on Monday morning unrefreshed and weary. The pleasant land of sleep, which should have been a land of stillness, had been for him full of voices, vague, unintelligible, menacing. The memories of the preceding day pursued him. The face he had seen in the picture hung before him, painted on dark clouds; the silent lips moved in some incommunicable counsel; the eyes, so full of pain and love, shone like stars out of wells of gloom. He had the sense of being watched by some presence that he feared. Then the dark heavens moved as if a host passed by; they passed with a sound like wind in the boughs of an interminable forest. He had the sense of vast suspended destinies, of some unspeakable event of which these hosts possessed the secret; of millions upon millions of human creatures crowding to some solemn tryst. Then the stir and tumult of these trampling multitudes sank in awful silence. The silence was so complete that

he could overhear the breathing of the world, the throb of the earth's pulses. It lasted but for a moment; it was instantaneously broken by a crash of awful music, and with fragments of some supreme harmonies ringing in his ears he awoke.

He lay a long time, while the blue light of dawn passed to grey and then to gold, thinking of these things. He tried hard to disentangle his confused thoughts, to reduce them to coherence, but the effort was vain. He felt a painful need for counsel, for sympathy; but where was he to find them? Hitherto he had found them in his wife, but he knew instinctively that in this strange crisis of his life that refuge would be of no avail. He could imagine with what gentle irony she would receive his confidences, he could see upon her face that expression of uncomprehending wonder which such confidences would excite. Her bright, alert, practical intelligence would recoil at once from any element that was fantastic or abnormal. For the first time in his life he realised with vividness how solitary is the individual soul; how the more intimate secrets of the spirit are rarely communicable; how within the innermost coils of being sits a creature never fully visible even to the eyes of fondest love or closest friendship.

Monday morning was usually a time of special

confidences between the husband and wife. It brought an atmosphere of pleasant relaxation, a sense of leisure, a spirit of gaiety. It was the true Sabbath hour, when the mind moved freely, and each had learned to value it; the more so, because it was so brief. It was for each a place of green pastures interposed between two long stages on the dusty road of duty.

But as West met his wife at breakfast this morning, he found any kind of conversation difficult. Her gay comments on persons and events fell on heedless ears.

"What did Payson Hume want with you, I wonder?" she asked. "He wanted something, I'll be bound. For my notion of Payson Hume is that for all his way of doing things on impulse, he never really acts except on calculation."

"O, he had nothing much to say—nothing of importance, that is."

"I'm not so sure of that. Have you ever noticed his eyes?"

"What about his eyes?"

"Why, they are small, and have a quite peculiar shallowness. There is a curious vulpine look in them at times. They are like the bright, hard eyes of a bird—a bird of prey."

"O, nonsense," said West. "Hume is a very good fellow in his way."

"Well, I guess it's a way I wouldn't trust. And you'll be wise not to trust it."

West made no comment. Presently he pushed from him his untasted breakfast.

"I think I'll go to the ministers' meeting this morning," he said. "It is a long time since I put in an appearance."

"I thought you had given it up altogether," said Helen. "You've told me lots of times that it was a waste of time."

"Well, I've time to waste this morning," he replied, with a smile. "I don't feel like work. And, after all, I suppose that decency demands an occasional visit to the brethren."

"O, well, if it's a question of decency," she said, with a laugh. "But I did really want to talk with you this morning about the Ladies' Club. They want to give a full-fledged theatrical performance next month in aid of the Musical Fund, and the only night that will suit them appears to be the prayer-meeting night. So here's a question of decency, too, you see. I don't particularly object to the theatricals, but I don't like them as a substitute for the prayer-meeting. Do you?"

The question, so abruptly put, startled West into attention. The Ladies' Club was one of the most powerful social organisations of the Church. He had himself established it, in the first place, for the

purposes of literary culture; but of late years he had exercised no restraint over it, and it had gone its own way, with the result that its primary aim had been almost wholly forgotten.

"I don't see very well what to say to them," said Helen plaintively. "They're just set upon this play, and they will have it on prayer-meeting night, because they say people won't come out twice in the week, and they must have the night when they are accustomed to come out. And they're as touchy as can be, if you interfere with them. They seem to think the church exists for them, and they know very well that the church does depend on them to raise a good deal for the Musical Fund, and they think that gives them the right of dictation."

West still remained silent.

"Well, what have you to say?" urged Helen.

"I'll think it over," he said.

But while he spoke it was not so much of Helen and her dilemma he was thinking, as of that strange man who had asked him the night before, "What are churches for?" He seemed to glide between the husband and wife with his insistent question. West remembered the curious phrase by which he had more than once described the churches,— "the abodes that bear the name of Christ." The quiet irony of the phrase now struck him for the first time. Was that, indeed, all that the churches

were, abodes that bore the outward Name, but had no inward Presence?

"I don't believe you can afford to offend them; you had better remember that when you do your thinking," Helen continued. "You see, we've let them have their own way so long, that they are sure to resent interference. And I suppose, after all, they are useful, and I don't see how the church could do without them."

"No, that is the misery of it," said West, with sudden abrupt earnestness. "The whole thing is indefensible. We've let the world into the Church, and the Church has been absorbed by the world. We've reduced the whole thing to play-acting, and what wonder that the people now think that it is entirely proper that the play should displace the prayer-meeting? It is only what might be expected. It is a just punishment for our lack of faith in spiritual principles. Yes, we have lost faith in them, and that is why we have called the world in to help us, so that now we admit without shame that the Church cannot exist at all without the partnership of the world. O, every one knows the situation but ourselves; the poor know it—we don't exist for them; workingmen know it—they have no money to bring with them, and therefore are not wanted; the Ladies' Club know it, and make their demand with the calm assurance of conquerors.

Why attempt to deny it? We *are* conquered. The world has conquered us."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Helen, in astonishment. "I never knew you felt like that."

"Perhaps I didn't know myself—till this moment," he replied. "But I know now. And I feel as if the strain of it would kill me."

"O, it's not as bad as that," said Helen soothingly. "But you do surprise me. I begin to think blood counts for everything after all. You've reverted to type—you're a Puritan, a real old-fashioned pleasure-denouncing Christian, whom Jonathan Edwards would have certified as sound."

"I wish to God I was," he said bitterly. "To myself I seem much more like an impostor."

"I believe you are suffering from a brain-storm—that's what's the matter," said Helen.

But at this shaft of raillery he fled. He was much too sore and sensitive to endure even the kindest ridicule. He put on his hat, and walked rapidly to the ministers' meeting.

During the walk his thoughts were busy. Like most men who live an intellectual life, he was much given to self-analysis. It might even be said that he took undisguised delight in the study of his own emotions and the movements of his own mind. But it was not so much delight as alarm that he felt this

morning. What had happened to him? For he was conscious of some inexplicable change in himself. Why had he spoken as he had about the Church? It seemed as though a new and unknown self had spoken. The speech had been wrung out of him. And then, why was it that the face in the picture had so obsessed his imagination, why was it that the words uttered by that strange man in the darkened church had taken so firm a hold upon his memory? The long habit of self-analysis had given him, so he supposed, an adequate acquaintance with himself. He would have described himself as a person of clear intelligence, slenderly endowed with imaginative faculties, and by no means liable to sudden gusts of emotion; a born hater of extravagance in thought, a born lover of measure and decorum in conduct,—in a word a thoroughly rational man, able to yield his mind to the most lucid light of reason. But now it seemed as though unsuspected abysses had opened in his own nature. He had become subject to a new play of forces. Above all, he felt as if some web of mystery was closing round him, some occult and unknown power held him in its grip. He could not understand it.

He was still pursuing this process of self-analysis when he arrived at the hall in which the ministers' meeting was held.

This hall was a spacious, dimly-lighted room in the upper story of a building filled with the offices of various denominational societies. On the ground floor was a large bookstore, which was a favourite rendezvous of ministers. It was the custom of ministers to divide their attention between the bookstore and the meeting which nominally brought them together.

This morning few ministers were in the bookstore, for word had gone out that an English minister of some distinction was to address the meeting. When West went upstairs he found the meeting already begun.

Some tedious minutes of a previous meeting were being read amid a general buzz of conversation and some half-jocular interruptions. West had ample time to observe the assembly, and he did so with some curiosity, because he so seldom visited it.

It was in many respects a notable assembly. The faces were almost all good, and in some instances striking. Some of the older men presented a truly venerable appearance, and this was increased by a certain air of dignified tranquillity which characterised them. But as West closely observed this congregation of ministers, it grew upon him that these older men were a race by themselves. The middle-aged and particularly the younger men, were of a wholly different type. It was a commoner,

a more mundane, type. Most of them wore clothes distinctly secular, and their faces were secular, too. They had the brisk, alert air of men of business; their eyes were frank and keen, their features firmly moulded; they looked resolute and capable. But they had no gleam of that curious tranquillity which all the older men displayed. Among the men under fifty there was not a single face that could have been taken for the face of a poet or a prophet.

West, observing these distinctions, found himself enquiring after their cause. Suddenly he put his hand upon the clue. These older men were in truth priests; the younger men were not. In all probability the older men were much inferior to the younger in intellectual qualities, but they had dwelt in an atmosphere of faith, they had been the custodians of Sacred Mysteries, and acquaintance with these mysteries had cast a solemn light upon their lives. Yes, it was that which was wanting in the faces of the younger men—the solemn light of mystery. And was not the same distinction visible in the Church itself? Had not the later Church become an elaborate organisation, which called less and less for the function of the priest, and more and more for the alert faculties of the business manager? The changed type was always the fruit of the changed environment. These secularised ministers, with their brisk manners, their undreaming eyes,

their effect of prosperous capacity, were the plain evidence of a secularised Church.

West's thoughts were interrupted by the burst of applause that greeted the rising of the English visitor, who was to address the meeting.

He was a man no longer young, of middle stature, with a somewhat remarkable appearance. The face was a long oval, without beard or whisker; the forehead high and unusually broad, crowned with hair prematurely white; the eyes of a clear grey; the mouth kindly but firm. He was accounted brilliant, a master of phrase and epigram. His later ministry had been passed among cultured people who appreciated these gifts; very few knew or remembered that his earlier ministry had been devoted to the poor. Still fewer knew that he was a poet who had achieved some distinction, and might have achieved far more had not his arduous public life absorbed his entire mental energies. There were many present this morning who had read his books, and were acquainted with his reputation, and the expectation of a brilliant address was general.

The applause sank into silence. After some preliminary words, excellently phrased, the speaker began to deal not with any problems of theology, as was common on these occasions, but with certain vital facts in his own experience. The face, which had seemed impassive in repose, became illumined,

the eyes shone, the full rich voice became tremulous as with feeling.

“What was a Church for?” This proved to be the real theme of his address, and West recalled at once the question of the strange man in the church the night before, and felt a certain shock of the coincidence.

“Why did it exist? What was it meant to be and do?”

The speaker answered his own questions with a narration of the growth of his own mind. Perhaps there is no form of speech so deeply affecting as the confessional, when the confession is absolutely sincere. This is why a rough uncultured speaker in a mission-hall often achieves an immediate and profound effect denied to the most elaborate eloquence. And this speaker was not only sincere, but he had a story to tell which struck at once at the very heart of those thoughts and difficulties which were more familiar to his hearers.

He began by describing his own church in England, its ideals, its temper, its character. It was a church built by, and intended for, a fairly wealthy suburban population. It had a tradition of culture of which it was proud. He also had shared that pride. But, as years went on, he became dissatisfied with this temper. He saw that it worked continually in the direction of complacency and ex-

clusiveness. Like most modern churches this church developed a vast array of organisations. It made ample provision for the social, intellectual, and even the physical needs of its own people. It became famous for the variety and number of its clubs, which appeared to serve a most useful purpose. But they gradually usurped the spiritual functions of the church, though so imperceptibly that no alarm was felt. The time came, however, when this result was no longer negligible. And, then came the question, "What is a Church for?"

"Well, that question came to me," said the speaker, "with the authority of a revelation. It dismayed me. It beat down my pride, and covered me with shame. A torturing disquiet seized upon me. I had thoughts of giving up the ministry. I went into the pulpit with reluctance. I no longer took pleasure in my own sermons; they seemed to me travesties of some nobler function of which I seemed incapable."

A long sigh passed over the meeting. To many men there some elements in this experience were known—to West particularly.

"Very slowly the answer was revealed to me," said the speaker. "But it came at last. It came when I tried to think of Jesus Christ in my place. What would He do? Would He spend His week in building up, by all the artifices of a glittering

rhetoric, sermons that merely delighted the intellect? The thought was inconceivable. Would He be content to preach to one narrow section of the community, to people bound together by common tastes, a common social ideal, but widely separated, even wilfully separated, from those who were not their social kin? Again it was inconceivable. Would He, Whose heart was so set upon eternal things that all other things appeared trivial, have allowed His Church to be transformed into a social club, catering for the pleasure and even the amusement of its members? It was not only inconceivable, but profanely so.

“What would He do? It was vain to plead altered circumstances and modern needs, for the Church in Christ’s day was not at all unlike the Church in our day, and the real needs of men are not changed by time. What He did not do in Judea, He would not have done in England. And, again, what He did in Judea was precisely what He would have done in England.

“That was my dilemma. I might boldly renounce the authority of Christ, which I dared not do; I might accept it, but if I did so, I must obey it implicitly. And to accept it plainly meant this: to attempt to do in England the kind of things Jesus did in Judea. My decision was made. I resolved to make my church a true Church of

Christ—to act in everything as though He and not I presided over it.

“You will perhaps say that this is an impossible ideal. All ideals are impossible, but nevertheless our highest wisdom is to strive after them. You will say it is a fantastic ideal. So many people told me, but when they saw the ideal at work they were silent. For it did work—incredible as it sounds, it did work. I began to do the things Jesus did—in a very humble way, of course, and the first result was that my own Christ came back to me. He was no longer a myth, nor a figure in history, but a living Presence. The next result was that my church was reformed. The poor sought its doors; degraded and friendless people looked to it as a haven; it was no longer a preaching-station, but a spiritual and moral Hospice. And from the dry bones of that complacent church there sprang up an army of men and women, with tender hearts, with a zeal for humanitarian service, with a joy in sacrifice. For one brief and glorious year it was as though Christ Himself came visibly to His temple, healed the sick, raised the dead, wrought miracles, and proved His Gospel the power of God in the salvation of men.”

The speaker paused, overcome by his own emotion. One old minister shouted “Glory!” The word clashed like a cymbal on the tense air. A loud murmur of applause ran through the room.

"Hush," said the speaker—"I have but a word to add. I was long unwise, I was difficult to teach, but at last I have learned my lesson. I know now what churches are for; yes, and I know the only ideal that can help us to make them what they should be. It is to realise that Christ is in the world, that He comes to us in every poor wayfaring man who needs our help.

"We know how we should behave if He were to come indeed, in His own person. Ah, if a rumour now ran round the world that He had truly come again—that His sacred feet once more trod the soil once stained with His own blood—that He was upon the road, travelling towards us—that He might arrive at any hour, that at some hour not far distant He must arrive—ah, if we knew that, with what passionate alarm and haste we should alter our behaviour, alter almost everything within our churches, knowing full well that neither we nor they were ready to receive Him."

He lifted up his arms, and stood so for a moment, absolutely silent, as though he saw the vision he described.

"And who knows?" he said at last. "Who knows but that He may even so come to-day, to-night, before to-morrow's dawn? 'Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh!'"

This conclusion of the address was totally unexpected. Its effect was what is often called electrical: and in this instance the phrase was justified, for it was as though a flash of something vivid and penetrating ran from man to man, from heart to heart. In the dim light of the room the faces of the men had a strange whiteness; they stood out strained and eager. In some the look was wonder, in some apprehension. The novel expression slowly relapsed into the normal. Men began to whisper comments to each other. This was more than West could bear. He foresaw the sort of discussion that would follow, the questions that would be asked, the controversial notes that would be sounded—all tending to destroy the effect that had been produced, to drag down a great sincere utterance till it was soiled with the mire of the commonplace. Already one of the brethren, notorious for his glibness, and always the first to speak in these clerical debates, was on his feet and had begun to speak. West fled at the first sound of that strident voice.

“Francis West, if He came as I come, wouldst thou receive Him?”

The question rang anew upon his ears. It rose above the clamour of New York, it seemed written on the air. What answer could he give?

VI

THE BRIDGE PARTY

WEST walked rapidly and aimlessly up Fifth Avenue toward the Central Park. The address to which he had just listened had moved him deeply, and not alone by its substance. There was another element about it which produced a sense of mingled fascination and awe, viz., its extraordinary application to his own recent experiences.

Surely there was something more than strange in the order and character of these experiences. First, there had come the mysterious arrest laid on Stockmar's speech, and his subsequent confession of what he believed to be its cause. Then there had followed the impression created by the picture in Hume's house, and, following this, the conversation with that strange man at the conclusion of the Sunday evening service. Now there was this address at the Ministers' Meeting, so poignantly sincere in itself, so unexpected, and in its closing appeal so startling. The relation of these things to each other had a kind of logic which could not

be accidental. It was true that strange coincidences happened in human life; biography and history were full of them, and novelists delighted in them. But these events were not to be explained by the law of coincidence. The reason itself rejected such a theory. They fitted too accurately; they were like the developments in some great musician's theme, each separate, but each dependent on the other, growing out of the other, and each carrying on the same central thought to more passionate expression. They displayed not coincidence, but sequence; they were progressive in their nature, and overwhelmingly cumulative in their effect.

Here was a solution of his perplexities; but the mind no sooner discerned it than it ran back like a retreating tide to the shores of cold rationality. For what did such a solution imply? Nothing less than the pressure of an unseen Hand upon the keys of life. Such a conclusion would not have seemed novel to the Puritan, and it was a commonplace to the religious mystic. Each would have readily admitted the action of some external Power upon the personal life—the unseen Hand upon the keyboard. In a sense, no doubt, this was true; even writers so dissimilar as Milton, George Eliot, and Kipling, had made this admission about their writings. But this was different. It was not the play of the Eternal mind on the plastic surface of indi-

vidual genius; it was a series of deliberate events pressing upon a humble individual life. Could he believe this to be possible?

His eye at that moment was taking in the brilliant spectacle of Fifth Avenue on a sunny afternoon. Here was the usual throng of carriages and motors; the hurrying pedestrians, the familiar tumult of human life; the high buildings packed with human creatures like mites in a cheese, the indistinguishable throngs at the corners of the streets, flushed faces at the open windows of hotels and restaurants, satisfied faces of men and women in carriages, surveying life with the comforting disdain of isolation; the noise of coming and going, the sense of individual concern, of pressing private aim in each of these ciphers of the endless sum; and who among them had any sense of an unseen Hand upon the keys of life? Who could conceive each of these tiny, fluttering creatures as centres of a vast web of destinies and influences which reached beyond the stars? They seemed so satisfied with their environment, so secure, so entirely at home among things visible. Let West tell his story to any one of these, and he would laugh in his face. Let him describe to them the pressures of an external Power upon his spirit, and they would stare at him as a maniac.

It is so the world always rushes in upon our

hours of sacred intuition, trampling out the torch of truth, overturning the new-built altar of our faith; that world which is forever jealous of eternity, and afraid lest we should learn the secret of our birth; for the world knows well that he who knows that secret has escaped its bondage, and broken the seduction of things temporal. "Keep men ignorant, so shalt thou keep them slaves" has always been the axiom of oppressors. And it is so that the world regards each one of us.

But, although West could find no immediate reply to the challenge of these thoughts, there was one plain duty which had become increasingly clear to him. He could at least recover for himself the lost function of the priest. He could and must use these experiences of his for the purification of his ideals. He could and must strive to make his church a true abode of Christ. And with that thought there came the recollection of the Ladies' Club.

It occurred to him that he was but a few minutes' walk from the house of Mrs. Lorimer, the president of the club, and he resolved to call on her at once.

Mrs. Lorimer was the sister of Payson Hume, to whom she bore a softened physical resemblance. She was a large, fair woman, with exceedingly bright vivacious eyes, and genial manners; but be-

neath these outward attractions there was concealed a strong will, capable of much obstinate selfishness. Her main point of difference from her brother was her attitude to life. Payson Hume found his one real pleasure in the accumulation of money; Mrs. Lorimer found hers in spending it. During her husband's lifetime she had had little opportunity of acquiring this pleasant art. Augustus Lorimer had been not only avaricious, but penurious. He had been content with a dull house and the society of dull people; changing standards of life did not in the least affect him, and wealth produced no alteration in his habits. When he died, his widow speedily avenged herself for her long arrears of deprivation. She found herself in the possession of wealth, and she gave her entire attention to the best method of making it the means of pleasure. It would be a tedious task to follow all the manœuvres which at last landed her in the realm of fashionable society; it is enough to say that she reached it much more quickly than most persons in her position, for she was adroit, astute, and indomitable, as well as attractive. One necessary part of her programme was to become a member of a fashionable church, and, after careful deliberation, she selected West's. There she soon became a social leader. When the Ladies' Club was organised she became its president, and she had been so ever since.

She had always liked West for his quiet air of good breeding; he had liked her for her social charm. There was in her, indeed, very little else to like; for West knew perfectly well that religion sat upon her lightly, that her culture was entirely superficial, that her intelligence was limited. He respected her capacity indeed; but there is nothing likeable in mere capacity; it may excite admiration, but it does not attract friendship.

Mrs. Lorimer met him in the hall with an almost effusive welcome.

"Why, my dear Dr. West," she said, "how glad I am to see you. I have been positively hoping you would call, for I want a little quiet conversation with you."

"And I with you," said West.

"Really? Why, that is quite a good example of telepathy, isn't it? But I fear we must wait a little while for our talk, for I've a few friends here this afternoon. You know them all, I think. Walk right in, and let me give you some tea."

West entered the long double drawing-room which lay to the right of the hall. He was surprised to find that, though it was an afternoon of bright sunshine, the blinds were drawn and the electric lights were burning in the room. The front drawing-room was empty, but the back drawing-room was full of people. Half a dozen small square

tables filled this room; on each delicately shaded lights burned, around them fashionably dressed women sat. Entering suddenly from the strong sunlight into this dim room, he was at first unable to recognise Mrs. Lorimer's guests. A moment later he was aware that they were nearly all members of his own congregation, and that they were playing bridge.

They looked up at his entrance, nodded slightly, smiled, and were at once re-absorbed in the game. Each face wore a rapt, intense look, in each the features were sharpened by an unwholesome eagerness. A stranger, ignorant of their employment, might have supposed that these pale, sharp-featured women, with their air of silent, intense absorption, were engaged in some occult rite. They spoke in low voices from time to time; there was no other sound save the occasional rustle of silk, as a player shifted her position, or stretched out a white arm to seize her winnings. The impression of the scene was disagreeable. A mere spectator, even though he were but moderately sensitive to æsthetic ideals and had no sense of morals at all, must have recognised something essentially false and meretricious in this perfumed room from which the daylight was excluded, in these silent women whose intent eyes watched with such eagerness the fortunes of the cards. To West, conscious of the stirrings of a

new life within his soul, the scene was more than meretricious; it was unutterably repugnant.

At the same time he was perfectly aware that this repugnance was newborn and novel. What right had he to assume suddenly the authority of a censor? Mrs. Lorimer's card-parties were a social commonplace. He himself had taken part in them occasionally. As for the Ladies' Club, why, there was scarcely one member of it who was not an ardent bridge player. But this afternoon he was seeing all things in an altered perspective, and with purged vision. As he looked on the scene he was for the first time conscious of its appalling vulgarity. Disguise the unpleasant fact how one might, yet it was clear that the master-motive in the breasts of all these women was mere common greed—the greed that makes the bootblack gamble on a horse-race, the clerk rob his employer to take options in stock, the roulette-players throng the tables at Monte Carlo. And there was another impression, too, which was even stronger—the degrading triviality of the scene. What sort of minds were these that on an afternoon of sunshine, in the heart of a busy and earnest world, could prefer a curtained room, and spend themselves in the mean and feverish anxieties of a game of chance? There was something in the act that outraged self-respect, tarnished the modesty of nature, scorned the nobler

functions of the mind. To women such as these no sense of the splendour and the gravity of human life was possible.

He drank his tea in silence, Mrs. Lorimer meanwhile going from group to group with soft tread, and from time to time addressing him in whispers.

"They have nearly finished," she said at last.

There was a long sigh, a rustle of silk, a movement of chairs, and then an eager buzz of conversation. The game was over.

"Ah, Dr. West, what a pity you were not here with us," said a young girl. "It's quite the most exciting game I've had for weeks."

Others said the same thing, with parrot-like insistence, as they shook hands with him. It had indeed been a famous game; some hundreds of dollars had changed hands; never before had the stakes been so high or the play so daring. One by one they departed, some radiant, some unusually quiet, all betraying in their hurried, nervous manner the strain they had endured. At last West found himself alone with Mrs. Lorimer.

"And now, my dear Doctor," she began, "we'll have our little talk in peace. But first let me discharge my obligations. I always levy a small tax on my Monday bridge parties for the benefit of our Musical Fund—no one objects, and in a year, you know, it amounts to a good deal. Let me see—this

afternoon has brought exactly twenty dollars. So you see, even in our pleasures we don't forget our dear church."

"Will you pardon me?" he replied. "I cheerfully acknowledge your kindness, but I must not take that money. I really cannot."

"And pray, why not?" she answered. "You've taken it before. You are surely not going to begin a tirade about 'tainted money,' are you? Ah, that reminds me of what a man said the other day on that subject. He said the only fault in tainted money was that it 'ain't enough.'"

She leaned forward, with a confidential air, to tell her little story, and closed it with a light laugh.

"No, it's not altogether that, Mrs. Lorimer," he answered. "It's the whole thing. How can I put it to you?"

"How indeed!" she replied with faint irony.

"O, I know you have good cause to criticise me," he said, "but you would have cause to despise me, too, if I didn't give you my honest thought on this—and some other matters."

"Am I in for a bad scolding? Well, I don't know what I've done, but I'm ready to listen to you."

She was still smiling, but there was a tinge of acerbity and mockery in her tone as she added, "One should always listen with respect to the ad-

monition of one's spiritual pastors and teachers, I suppose."

"I don't know that I'm qualified to give you admonition," he replied, with quiet dignity. "At all events, that is not my intention. But I would like, if you will let me, to give you the doubtful benefit of some thoughts that press upon my mind."

"I am all attention, pray go on." She yawned slightly, and settled herself into her chair, with her hands folded in her lap.

"Yawning is only permitted in church," he said, with a return of his habitual manner of pleasant irony.

"I apologise," she flashed back. "But it is your own fault, if you *will* preach sermons in private."

"My sermon shall be brief, at least, and I think it will not be tedious."

He once more became grave.

"Well, let us be serious," he continued. "This is the substance of what I want to say. During the last few hours I have had special occasion to think seriously about the Ladies' Club, and indeed about several other things in the life of the church. It seems to me that we have all got upon a wrong tack. I am in the main responsible, and any words of censure I may utter come home to me more than to any other. Let the Ladies' Club serve for an illustration of what I mean. When it began, its

chief aim was to help forward the social and intellectual life of the women of the church. In those days you were content to study Browning, and so forth. It gradually became more social and less intellectual in its aim. First there were luncheons, then dances; now we have got to bridge and theatricals. A good many of the older folk objected; but there was always the bribe offered that by these means you raised money for the church. The last thing I hear is that you want to perform a play on the church premises, and that no night will suit you but the night long since fixed for the prayer-meeting. Mrs. Lorimer, we must call a halt somewhere. A church cannot expect the respect of the community, and cannot retain the respect of its own adherents, if it does not at least set its spiritual ideals above all other ideals. This is a contest between the spiritual and the worldly. I am on the side of the spiritual. Mrs. Lorimer, the play must not take place, and the Ladies' Club, unless it will consent to a radical change of programme, must be dissolved."

"Well, I will say one thing for your sermon—it certainly is not tedious, though I find it sufficiently amazing. You have certainly succeeded in giving me a bad nervous shock."

He was silent, and his silence was interpreted as an affront. Mrs. Lorimer's face flushed, and her

hands trembled. Her fixed smile, her air of pleasant badinage, her studiously graceful manners all vanished, as by a touch of magic. A hard look came into her eyes, her mouth tightened, and the essential woman, wilful, passionate, selfish, and coarse in grain, suddenly appeared.

"And you would dictate to me—you?" she said, in a loud voice.

Then she recollected herself. The venomous thing that had looked from her eyes an instant recoiled and vanished. She laughed.

"O, I didn't mean that," she said. "It was an exclamation born of nervous shock. But let us continue this most interesting conversation. Let me see—where were we? You object to dances, to bridge, to theatricals in connection with the church. Do you mind telling me what has led to this extraordinary change of view, for hitherto, if my memory serves me, you have been quite with us in all these things."

"Yes, I will tell you—you have a right to know. Last Sunday night I had a question put to me at the close of the service, 'What are churches for?' The man who put the question appeared to be a poor workingman. This morning the same question was put to me again by a speaker whose general view of life is far from narrow, and whose distinction entitles him to respect. It seems that both he and

that poor workingman agree in their conception of what a church is for. It exists for one thing alone: to nourish the spiritual life of the world, to train men and women in sympathy that will lead to social service, to help them to realise the presence of God. It does not exist to minister to the pleasures and frivolities of a passing world. If it profits by them, it is at the price of its own betrayal. Mrs. Lorimer, will you let me put the whole question in its plainest form: do you think Jesus Christ lived and died to produce such a church as mine has been? Do you think that He would permit for an instant such things as we have sanctioned? Do you think that He who drove the money-changers from the temple, although their business was in part religious, because their very presence had defiled it—do you think He would accept for His work money gained by bridge, and by theatrical displays? And it is His church, remember. It bears His name. We have proudly called it the Church of the Redemption. And because it is His, He will surely come to it one day; and what will you and I say to Him when He comes?"

"When He comes—why, of course He isn't coming," she retorted. "I did not suppose that any one believed in such a thing. And besides, the world has moved a long way since that day."

"Moved, yes; but in what direction?"

"Toward freedom, of course. I'm sure I've heard you say so often enough. Didn't you tell us years ago that the church had just as good a right to good music as the opera-house—and so we engaged a quartette? Didn't you tell us that the proper spirit of the church was inclusive, not exclusive, and that we were quite entitled to make certain forms of pleasure part of our programme, as well as certain forms of piety? O, I have an excellent memory. You have builded better than you knew. Behold, your disciple."

"I admit it," he replied. "I admit it with sorrow."

"Why sorrow. Am I a person to be pitied?"

"I think that Christ would pity us both if He were here," said West.

"I'm sure I don't know why. No one can accuse me of not being a good churchwoman. I have given a vast amount of time to the work of the church, and it does strike me as remarkably ungrateful to tell me now that I am an object of pity."

"Dear Mrs. Lorimer, don't you see what I mean? Don't you see that I am not blaming you, but myself? It is a question of right and wrong. I repeat that we have all gone wrong in our church methods, and I more than you or any one else,

because I have misled you. I am resolved to retrace my steps. You followed me in my error; won't you follow me now, in my attempt to retrieve my error?"

"I don't admit the error—that is where your argument fails," she replied, in a cold, obstinate voice. "You may have had some special illumination; the trouble is that I have had none. Don't expect me to act as if I had."

"If you were to see Jesus Christ, to really see Him, for an instant, do you think you could say——"

"O, pray let us close this painful conversation," she interrupted. "It's getting too preposterous, too fantastic altogether."

"I know a man who saw Him no later than two days ago," said West, in a low voice.

"You know—but I will not listen to such nonsense. You have said a great many strange things to me, now let me say some plain things to you. You may turn your back on all your past teaching, if you please: I shall not do so, because you were at least sane in that teaching, and I begin to question if you are any longer sane. Moreover, that teaching suited me, the present does not, and I appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober. As for the Ladies' Club, it will go on precisely as it has done in the past. It includes all the best families

in the church, and what they demand the church is bound to grant. If you choose to set yourself in opposition to the church, it will not be the church that will suffer in the conflict. I hate to say these things, but it is better that I should say them to you privately than that others should do so publicly, as they soon will."

There was a real trace of sincerity in her voice, even a touch of feeling. And in her counsel, however bluntly put, there was true worldly sagacity, as West silently admitted. He knew perfectly well that Mrs. Lorimer's enmity would be fatal to him. He could not be offended with her: after all, was she not, as she had said, his disciple? Here was the finished product of his ministry, he reflected sadly: a woman thoroughly hard and worldly, without spiritual sensitiveness, avid for every form of pleasure, whose religion was at best a mere social asset. But whatever her enmity meant, he felt he must endure it. He feared it indeed; he was not yet so lifted out of his old grooves of thought as to be freed from fear. Perhaps his courage in this crisis was all the more heroic because it existed in spite of fear.

"Mrs. Lorimer," he said, "I perfectly understand your position; it only remains that you should understand mine. I can offer you no compromise. I must take my own course. If from to-day you

and I stand on different sides, remember this—with me it is a question of principle which I dare not disregard.”

“My friend,” she said, with an almost scornful emphasis, “do you know that you are about to ruin your career?”

“A ruined career is not the worst thing that can happen to a man,” he replied. “A much worse thing is a ruined soul.”

They stood facing each other in perfect silence for a moment. A door closed in the hall; it seemed like an explosion. A pile of cards, left carelessly upon the edge of a table, fell to the ground with a noise that seemed unnatural. And—was it all imagination—upon the tense air once more that searching question trembled, “Francis West, if I came, as once I came, wouldst thou receive Me?”

West bowed his head.

A piercing sweetness flooded all his nature for one brief moment, an arrowy flame shot through him.

“Yes, Lord,” he murmured. “Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.”

VI

THEY OF ONE'S OWN HOUSEHOLD

WEST left Mrs. Lorimer's house in a mood of strange elation. He was conscious that the currents of his life were turned into a new channel. His interview with Mrs. Lorimer had had one unforeseen effect: it had cleared his thought. It had acted upon his mind as a sudden touch acts upon a vase of water near the freezing-point; it had precipitated the process of cohesion. The fluid elements of thought had crystallised into definite conviction.

There were two things which he saw with entire distinctness. The first was that he had taken up a definite position. He had avowed his faith in Stockmar's story. He had admitted to himself the play of certain unknown forces on his own soul, which, for want of a better word, he named supernatural. The voices he had heard were real voices, and he meant to obey them. The second thing he saw was that no one would understand the new motives which guided his conduct. People of Mrs. Lorimer's type, people like Payson Hume, what

could be expected of them but scornful incredulity and bitter opposition? And they represented the majority, the majority even in his own church. He could hardly blame them; they would but act toward him as he himself would have acted a week ago toward any one who had come to him with a similar message. He would be made to drink the cup of scorn; he would become the object of derision, he would be deserted by those from whom he had received a thousand kindnesses. Nevertheless, his mood of elation held; and he knew that its source lay deep beyond the reach of circumstance, in the assurance of his own spiritual freedom. He knew the truth; the truth had made him free.

“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. Then shall they deliver up one another, and shall hate one another, and because iniquity shall be multiplied the love of many shall wax cold. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in clouds, and with great power and glory.”

The words so often read, so little pondered, rang upon his memory as he walked. How clear, how positive they were! With what a secure emphasis—surely the emphasis of absolute knowledge—did He speak who uttered them! And they were words

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spoken too upon the eve of death, when vision was clearest, when even for the humblest man the instinct for truth is strongest. Who could imagine the Saviour of the world, who had made the claim not only that He told the Truth but was the Truth, departing from the world with a lie upon His lips? And whatever else the reporters of His words omitted, they all reported these solemn sayings. To them they must have seemed much more incredible than to later ages, for they saw only a Galilean peasant where other ages saw One essentially divine; yet they reported them, realising that they were the last bequest of truth from One who had never lied. Ah, if these tremendous words had been discredited and forgotten, was not the reason this, that men no longer willed to believe them, and that as He Himself said, "The love of many had waxed cold" ?

To believe the incredible always means encounter with a hostile world. West realised that primary law of all spiritual freedom as he walked that afternoon along Fifth Avenue, reflecting on his interview with Mrs. Lorimer. And he realised, also, that the presence of such persons as Mrs. Lorimer in the Church, was the tacit evidence of the Church's own decay of faith, its repudiation of the unseen, its reconciliation to the world. A world no longer hostile to the Church implied a Church from whose

teaching and example the world had nothing left to fear.

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He was so absorbed in these thoughts that he had come to his own house almost unwittingly. As he entered it his elation diminished. The narrow hall, hung with photogravures of places and pictures seen and loved in foreign travel, the dinner-table with its refinement of flowers and white napery and gleaming crystal, the glimpse of library shelves in the adjoining room, crowded with books that long had fed his mind—all these symbols of a life governed in every detail by use and custom, suddenly held his mind like a vice. The power of the habitual gripped him; it fell upon his spirit with a dull weight, it quenched the fire of his soul. He was like a man who, after long travel in the limitless freedom of mountain or desert, comes home, and finds within an hour or two the old life of comfortless duties suddenly riveted upon him, like a collar on a dog.

The customary life—how strange it was that this should fulfil its little order, that this should go on quite unchanged, when in himself so much was changed? Here, he instinctively felt, lay his real battlefield. He must explain himself to his wife. And the same instinct told him that the explanation could not be delayed. He had reason to fear

its effect on her; he would have postponed it if he could; but he was not secretive by nature, and was conscious, too, that each instant of delay must mean some evaporation of his courage. Already that sense of the habitual closing round him with a dull pressure warned him that his only hope of liberty lay in instant action.

Helen met him at the dinner-table with her usual smile of tired vivacity. During the course of the meal she entertained him with her pleasant gossip. He listened indifferently, until at last she remarked upon his inattention.

"You seem very dull to-night," she said. "Has anything happened to upset you?"

"I've seen Mrs. Lorimer," he answered.

"About the business of the Ladies' Club, I suppose?"

"Yes, about the business of the Club."

The meal was now over, and the happiest hour of the day had come. Coffee was usually served in the library, and when West had no evening engagement he usually spent this hour in conversation with his wife. Each had learned to value the occasion, to make it the opportunity of a gay exchange of thought and many pleasant confidences. "I am only really married for an hour in the day," Helen was accustomed to remark, "for my husband belongs to every one but me through all the other

hours." West had often wondered how much of real loneliness lay behind the irony of the remark, and even on his busiest days he usually contrived to keep this hour for Helen.

"And now," said Helen, as she settled herself into her rocking-chair, "tell me all about your talk with Mrs. Lorimer. I suppose you've made your peace with her; though, for a successful diplomatist, I must admit you don't look very happy."

"On the contrary, I've declared war upon her," he replied gravely.

"You don't say?" she replied, with a gay laugh. "Why, how surprised she must have been. But of course that is only a figure of speech. I suppose what you really did was to remonstrate with her with imperturbable politeness, and that she acknowledged your good manners by suitable concessions."

"I mean exactly what I say, Helen. We had no vulgar quarrel, of course; but we disagreed so completely that she now regards me as an enemy."

"But," said Helen, "that's serious. Please don't pique my curiosity by dark sayings and enigmas. Tell me all about it."

Thus adjured, West plunged at once into the heart of his story. He described the bridge-party, his refusal of the money, his direct repudiation of the methods of the club, his declaration of the true

ideal of the Church, and Mrs. Lorimer's surprise, indignation, and final expressions of hostility.

"But I don't understand," said Helen. "Why did you do this? It's not at all like you, and I'm sure that when you left me this morning you didn't mean to do it."

"No, I didn't," he admitted.

"Then what has happened, for it is clear something has happened? Why did you do it?"

Could he tell her? He looked wistfully at the fair face that confronted him, and remembered many things he would have been thankful to forget. She had never been what religious critics would call a spiritually-minded woman, but when he had first known her she had certainly possessed some spiritual instincts of which the later years afforded little trace. She was loyal, high-minded, thoughtful; but in her, as in him, and in large part through his influence upon her, the critical faculties had been developed at the expense of the emotional. And then there was that disputatious element in her blood, that inherited faculty of analysis, which so often in the children of New England had its issue in a hard bloomless lucidity of mind, in a life that is destitute of perfume and gracious suavity. How would she take the story he had to tell? How could it be supposed that such a story would find in such a mind a sensitive surface for

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its just interpretation? He looked upon her with alarm, for the first time perhaps intensely conscious of the records written on that face. It was a face clean and clear as a face upon a cameo; the grey eyes had much penetration, but no poetic depth; the mouth, still smiling with its tired vivacity, was nevertheless firm and almost hard; and the same pure hardness as of a cameo was indicated in the high but somewhat narrow forehead and the resolved outlines of the cheek and chin. For the first time it struck him that what such a nature needed for its equalising complement was an emotional religion, that what the face needed to become charming was the touch of tenderness produced by deep religious feeling. But to this manifest need of her nature he had never ministered. He had ignored it; he had even suppressed it. And now in the crisis of his own life he stood before her for judgment, and he foreknew her verdict.

Yet he must tell her the whole story. That, at least, was her right. If she replied, as Mrs. Lorimer had done, that the story was unintelligible to her because she did not share his special illumination, she would still be within her rights, and he must bear her repudiation as part of that punishment which he had brought upon himself by his past relations with her. "Then shall they deliver up one another, and shall hate one another;" was

he indeed about to learn what these words meant? He shuddered at the thought; it came to him with a throb of pain that was almost physical; but it had no effect on his resolve. She must know all; that was her right, and from that conclusion no escape was possible.

"Helen," he began. "Do you believe in the supernatural?"

"Why, what a strange question," she replied. "Tell me what you mean by it, and I will try to answer it, though what it has to do with Mrs. Lorimer I can't tell."

"It is not of Mrs. Lorimer I am going to speak now, except incidentally; it is of myself. What I mean by the question is something like this: do you believe that there are realms in which reason cannot guide us, that there are influences that intrude upon our lives which the mere reason cannot comprehend, that, in fact, it is still possible for men and women to have communion with unseen presences, hidden worlds—to hear their voices, even to have visions of them in certain rare states of feeling? Search your mind, and tell me honestly, if you believe this?"

"That's a very strange question," she replied. "I am not sure that I understand it. You see I am a very practical person, and life appears to me a very plain business. I remember that when I was

a girl I did believe in ghosts, and I once wasted a dollar on crystal-gazing. I very soon saw the nonsense of it, however. As for the supernatural in the wide sense, well, there may be such a thing, but I know nothing about it."

"Yet you are a Christian," he interjected.

"And pray what has that to do with it?"

"Simply that you derive your religion from records that are saturated with the supernatural. There is not a page of the Gospels in which you are not confronted by it."

"O, but that has been explained away long ago, hasn't it? No one imagines that sort of thing real. It will be news to me if you do."

West groaned in spirit. How was he to explain to this clear but narrow intellect the new beliefs that had suddenly sprung up in his own heart? Were not the very words he used symbols of one kind of thought to him, symbols of a totally different kind to her? Men of great sincerity of feeling, who experience startling changes in themselves, naturally suppose that others are equally susceptible of change; it is one of the most painful discoveries of life to find that this is an illusion. Paul's companions on the road to Damascus did not see the vision he saw; how was it possible, then, that they should feel about it as he felt? He had seen Jesus in the heavens; they saw nothing more than a

man suddenly overthrown in the hour of his pride by the violence of some mysterious disease, and they heard nothing more than the babblings of a madman. Yet he declared his vision, and West felt that same compulsion of confession as strongly as Paul. And he realised also that it was useless to try to make it credible by any weak attempts to conciliate the intellect. His business was simply to affirm it in all its stark impossibility; its effect on other minds could not be predicated; but since he could not calculate these effects it was clearly no concern of his to think twice about them. His mind was made up; he must confess the truth as he saw it.

He rose from his seat, and laid his hand on Helen's shoulder with a touch so gentle that it was a caress. His face was pale, his eyes gleamed.

"Helen," he said, "I am going to tell you something that will shock you, perhaps. Be patient with me, dear. At all events believe me honest."

She raised to him startled eyes, and a face as pale as his. But, although for an instant a great dread had fallen on her, a dread of she knew not what, her manner did not lose its elaborate composure. "Go on," she said quietly. "I am listening."

Once more he went over all the details of those occurrences which had meant so much to him. He

told the story quite baldly, but each plain phrase was weighted with conviction. The awfulness of the story grew upon him as he told it; his voice sank at times into a reverential whisper. He almost forgot the presence of Helen as he spoke; the things of which he spoke were so real to him that they absorbed his vision, and detached him from his immediate environment. Had his eye retained its more human vigilance, he might have found cause for alarm in the face of Helen. At first that face expressed simple wonder; but he had not spoken long before her eyes were averted, her lips exchanged their vivacious curve for a hard, obstinate line, her expression was cold and scornful. At length he ceased. His hand was still on Helen's shoulder; his first sensation, as he again became conscious of human things, was that Helen had withdrawn herself from his caress. She rose to her feet, pale, cold, silent—a woman of ice. And there was ice in her voice as she said quietly, "Well, have you done?"

"Yes," said West, "that is all."

"It is enough," she said, "more than enough, I think."

"Don't you believe me?"

"O, I believe you," she replied, in a dreary voice. "That is to say, I believe that you believe the strange things you tell me are true. But that

is not at all the kind of thing that weighs with me."

"Helen, dear wife, what is it you mean?"

He again placed his hand upon her shoulder, but she shrank from him. He noticed the action with dismay.

"Have you nothing to say?" he repeated.

"I have a good deal to say," she replied. A brief emotion of pity shook her heart as she looked upon his worn, tired face.

"Sit down," she said. "You are tired. And what I have to say will take time."

The emotion of pity was very brief; it passed and left her colder than ever.

"Francis, have I ever been disloyal to you in word or act?" she asked.

"No, you have always been loyal, dear."

"Believe me loyal still, then. There are some confessions which a husband may make to a wife which I think I could bear as well as most women. They might be shameful, confessions of weakness and temptation—yet if you had put your head upon my lap and told me these things, I think I could have borne them. You would still have been the man I knew, the man I loved, and I could have made allowance for a fault. But this that you have told me—it is a different thing. You are no longer the man I knew and loved. The man I loved was

rational, clear-sighted, wise, a man to be trusted. The man you now confront me with is irrational and crazed. He is a strange man, a man I never knew. And to him I have but one thing to say: I could bear to be the wife of a man who was betrayed by temptation or even fell into dishonour; I cannot bear to be the wife of a fool."

"Helen!" he cried. "Stop——"

"No, I will not stop," she said bitterly. "You have had your say; it is now my turn. But if you have still enough reason left to answer me a plain question, tell me this: do you know what sort of career lies before you?"

"I know that I must suffer. But what does that matter? Many others, far worthier than I, have suffered for the truth."

"For the truth, yes; I would not refuse to share any suffering you might endure for truth. But this—this tissue of delusion. I am not prepared to suffer for this. And it is delusion, the wildest delusion."

"To me it is truth."

"To you, but not to me—that is where we differ. And it is a difference that goes down to the very roots of life. Sins and faults may divide human creatures, but these you can bridge by many means. This is something that can't be bridged. I also have a reverence for truth; it is the last reverence left

to me, and for that reason I cling to it with the greater passion. And I should feel myself eternally dishonoured if I let that reverence go; if just because I loved you, I let you impose your wild irrationalities on me, and make me the accomplice of your folly."

"But I don't ask that, Helen. Keep your beliefs, but let me keep mine—that is all I ask."

"No, it is not all you ask, and you know it. What you really ask of me is to follow you meekly, or at least silently, while you plunge headlong into a vortex of deserved disaster. You may not yet be able to measure that disaster, or even to recognise it; but I can do both. You will lose your church, of course; that goes without saying. You will be covered with derision. You will find your ultimate companions among a few half-crazed fanatics—a very few, for fortunately for the world even these are rare. O, I could follow you even there, if I were as mad as you. But I am not mad. I have been bred in a love of reason, and wilful irrationality is a thing impossible to me. Francis West, I will not be the wife of a fool. I will not so shame my ancestry."

He did not reply, and she took his silence as a sign of yielding to her arguments.

"O, Francis," she cried, with genuine passion, for tortured love at last spoke in her, "tell me, O,

tell me that all these things you have said to me are a mere dream! It is impossible that you should have changed so utterly in three brief days. Such things don't happen, they can't happen. It is some fearful obsession of the mind that has overtaken you. Cast out the perilous stuff. Be yourself again—the man I have known and trusted all these years, the man I love.”

“I cannot change at will, Helen,” he said, in a low broken voice. “I know these things are true—I have had my vision—I dare not disobey it.”

“Then we come to the parting of the ways,” she replied, with a sob. It was a dry, tearless sob—it touched West in the utmost fibre of his tenderness. For one vivid moment he saw all that his love had been to him, all that its loss would mean; and he was tempted to cry, “Let everything go, if only love remains.” But he knew he could not say it. His tortured lips sought to frame the words in vain. He saw his house made desolate; he could avert that desolation by a word; yet he could not utter it. From some unsuspected source within himself a spirit of fortitude emerged; each inarticulate atom of his being ran together in a unity of protest; and it seemed some other Power, not within himself, supported him in that hour, and gave him utterance.

"I can't turn back, dear, even to keep your love. I cannot—I will not."

"Then you know the penalty." The hardness had come back into her voice. "I cannot bear to remain here to watch your downfall. I shall go home to-morrow to my mother. I will frame the best excuse I can to cover my disgrace; but the disgrace of having left you will be easier to bear than the shame I should endure if I remained with you."

She stood very erect as she spoke those final words, a slight, tense figure, all ice and steel, of an infinite chill composure, of an indomitable will, a creature capable of cruelty perhaps, but never of frailty.

She allowed him no reply. For one moment she paused on the threshold of the room, as if in mute farewell, and glanced at her husband as he sat with head bowed in his hands beside the table. But she did not come to him. Between him and her there was a great gulf fixed. The door closed, and she was gone.

"Then shall they deliver up one another, and shall hate one another."

Already the words were fulfilled.

VII

IVAN LEVIN

IN the meanwhile, while West fought out his solitary battle, strange things had been happening in the life of Stockmar.

As Stockmar sat on that memorable Saturday night poring over his Bible, he recollected the paragraph about the Doukhobors which Field had read from the evening paper. Who were these strange people? Were they merely wandering enthusiasts? Stockmar had spent some months at a Russian University in his youth, and was tolerably familiar with some of the aspects of Russian life and character. He did not remember that in those days he had heard a single word about the Doukhobors; but he had been acute enough to perceive that Russian character was not to be measured by what was to be seen of it in cities. Russia, among all modern nations, and almost alone among them, retained the qualities of primitive and pastoral life. In the great majority of her people character had a certain broad simplicity; the average Russian was the last person to be accused of levity of tempera-

ment, especially in relation to religious ideas. Meditating on this fact, the thought suddenly struck Stockmar that if a Christ really became once more manifest to men, it was probable enough that that manifestation would be made first of all to Russian peasants, who in their great simplicity of mind so much resembled the Galilean peasants to whom that manifestation was first made. It was a new idea, and in its light, Stockmar no longer saw the Doukhobors as a group of grotesque and insane fanatics.

Might they not be worth serious attention? Might they not be capable of imparting some instruction that was worth having? Such an interrogation, arising in such a mind as Stockmar's, was a curious phenomenon; but then his whole mind had suffered an enormous change, and he had passed at one step from complete agnosticism to the most primitive form of religious faith. He was now as a little child, newly introduced into a strange world, whose values were not yet apprehended or defined. And he had no one to guide him. The scales had fallen from his eyes, and he saw men as trees walking, but there was no Ananias to direct his uncertain steps.

Stockmar had always been a man of quick resolves. His was a nature that when it moved, moved altogether, for the basis of his character was that same broad simplicity so noticeable in the Russian peasant. He had lived in an artificial world,

but he was not an artificial man. The artificialities with which he had involved his life had now vanished; the strong primal characteristics had emerged. The blood of generations of peasants ran in his veins also, and that blood now asserted its indisputable claim.

The early hours of the day following that day on which he had had his vision found him traveling northward in search of the Doukhobors. Day and night for many weary hours the world ran past him like a long ribbon of green and blue, with transient flashes of scarlet where the maples lit the woods, and threads of tangled silver where quiet waters gave back the light of countless stars. At last he reached his bourne. His feet trod for the first time the illimitable prairie.

The place to which he had come was called Canora. His first impression was one of tranquil prosperity, of a kind of life that at all events knew the virtues of order and method.

Upon the slopes of a little glen the buildings of the village clustered amid green trees and undergrowth. They were long and low, built of logs; the roofs, plastered with clay, were overgrown with wild flowers; doors and shutters were painted in crude but pleasing forms of art; bright-coloured curtains hung at the windows, and each cottage had its garden. In and out of the open doors

children ran, each rosy with the tonic of the prairie wind. The women were strongly built, deep-bosomed, plain of feature: all that they wore was immaculately clean, and their aspect was wholesome and good. The men were at this hour in the fields.

Stockmar, entering the village, at once found a welcome. He discovered on enquiry that it was part of the religion of this simple people to show hospitality to all strangers without distinction, and to refuse all compensation.

An old man guided him to the house in which he was to lodge. He was met at the door by a huge fellow with ruddy cheeks, blue eyes, and flaxen hair, who had been hastily summoned from the fields. The man took his hand and kissed it in token of welcome. The room into which he was shown was rough, but spotlessly clean, and the home-spun linen had the fragrance of lavender. A hearty and plentiful meal was hastily prepared for him. During this repast he learned from his host some particulars of the people he had come so far to see.

It seemed that the settlement consisted of forty farms, which were worked in common by the whole community. An immense barn in the centre of the village was the commercial nucleus of this common life. There was a headman in the village to whom all earnings were handed over for invest-

ment, and applied for the common good. The entire colony was vegetarian. There was no smoking or drinking, and crime was unknown. The principles on which this little commonwealth rested were all derived from the plain teachings of Jesus Christ. No oath was permitted; the yea was yea, and the nay, nay. Appeals to civil law were forbidden. Disputes, if they arose, were settled quietly by appeals to Scripture. A spirit of tranquillity and cheerfulness was apparent everywhere. The people sang hymns at their work, the children sang at their play. There was an eminent gentleness about this strange people. Despised in their own country, persecuted and cast out, these peasants had brought with them no bitter feelings toward any one. They had left behind them that spirit of avarice and selfish individualism which makes life base in all older countries. Alone among all the peoples of the earth, so it seemed to Stockmar, this handful of fugitives, fleeing from oppression, had built up the only community visible to men which might be truly called Christian, which gave an example of that social happiness and contentment which Jesus sought to communicate to mankind.

How had all this been accomplished?

The answer was quite clear. To these men and women Jesus was a reality. And that He would come again was the mainspring of all their beliefs.

This belief had begotten in them not slavish fear, but a rapturous desire for His approval, and hence their entire life was arranged in accordance with those plain precepts which He had made binding on His followers.

The hours passed; he was still talking with his host, indescribably fascinated by the pictures he drew of this new world and life. The man was so unaffectedly happy and at peace, the life he described was so full of gentleness and sweetness, that Stockmar could only think with wonder and pity of that far-off world of New York, with its monotonous and empty passions, its violence, cruelty, and greed, its insane frivolities, its vulgar extravagances, its vain paraded wisdom which was but ignorance and folly. And again and again, when Stockmar asked the reason for some feature of this life which would have provoked ridicule in the clubrooms of New York, he received the simple answer:

“We do this because Jesus told us to!”

“And you believe that Jesus will come again?” said Stockmar.

“We are sure of it,” the man replied.

“But do you expect it, I mean. Do you, for instance, think that He might come to-night?”

“Why not?” said the man. “You know His words, sir: ‘Be ye also ready, for in such an hour

as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.' To some of us He has already come. To the others He will come soon."

"Have you seen Him?"

"No, sir, not yet. But as I said, there are some of us who have. Ivan Levin saw Him not long ago: it was but last week. And so we think the time is near for His appearing. Yet a few more days and nights shall pass, and all shall see Him, and they also who pierced Him."

There was a vibration of intense emotion in the man's voice as he said these words. His plain face was transformed, his keen blue eyes were soft and wistful.

"We are as those who wait for the morning," he said, in a low voice. "How long, O Lord, how long?"

"I also believe, brother," said Stockmar. "Yet let me ask one question, what about these people who go out to search for Christ—who do things that seem foolish?"

"They are mistaken, sir. They forget that He said many would cry 'Lo, Christ is here, or Lo, He is there; go ye not out after them.' I went with them once, but I found Him not. Now I have a better thought. Must we not *wait* His time, and seek to be ready when that time comes?"

"Yes, that is assuredly the better thought. But

what about the man you spoke of—Ivan Levin—you say he saw Him?”

“I will take you to Ivan Levin when the night falls; he will tell you. He is an old man, who does not work now. He spends his days in prayer; but at night he comes among us, and goes from house to house, saying, ‘Children, be patient. I have heard His footstep. The time is at hand.’ Yes, you must see Ivan Levin. I am but a plain man, but to him God has given vision, and we try to see with his eyes.”

“Is it a promise, brother?”

“It is a promise, brother. At nightfall I will take you to Ivan Levin.”

He took Stockmar’s hand and kissed it. “Peace be with you, brother,” he said; and left the room.

Stockmar passed the day in great solitude, and with a sense of peace that was entirely new to him. That peace was in part the natural gift of the scenes in which he found himself; but it was in larger part the result of elements within himself. For the first time that he could recollect since childhood the critical faculties of his intellect were in abeyance. Those faculties had for many years been the chief sources of his pleasure—when they were not the instruments of his torture. Often they were the latter. They had harassed him with infinite interrogations, quickened his whole mind into

feverish restlessness, and made him sceptical of everything. Perhaps there is no worse folly, and none of which the penalty is so certain, than this over-stimulation of the critical faculty in men of fine minds. The penalty usually comes in sterilised emotion, and final cynicism in opinion. Nothing satisfies, because every satisfaction seems incomplete. The common life of men is misunderstood because it is not shared, and soon appears intolerable. Much that is really sweet and good is neglected because it does not satisfy a taste that has become morbidly fastidious, and thus in the end life itself appears sterile and barren, and all the beliefs which animate and comfort ordinary men, a grotesque insult to the superior intelligence. Stockmar had not escaped these penalties; he had long viewed life in a spirit of disdain, and had felt himself an alien among men.

But now his nature was miraculously sweetened and softened. There had come back to him the long-lost faculty of wonder, that power of spiritual astonishment which is the gift of the child and the poet. He dwelt in a transfigured world, where every common bush was touched with a divine fire. Who should say that this or that thing was incredible? Where all appeared the work of miracle, miracle became the normal condition of existence. In that moment Stockmar found the truth of that amazing

word of Christ's, "All things are possible to him that believeth."

He gazed upon the little wooded glen, and beyond it into the vast spaces of the prairie over which the sun was now sinking. The whole scene seemed insubstantial, something that might dissolve at any moment. He could almost fancy that strange murmurs ran along the earth, perhaps the first sounds of this dissolution, perhaps the movement of some vast machinery, raising the curtain of the heavens on soundless pulleys. Certainly behind that curtain some presences dwelt; as certainly they might emerge. The hush of approaching night had an element of waiting in it. It was as if the world stood on tiptoe, listening for a footstep. And these men and women, whose evening hymns, sung as they came home from work, thrilled upon the stillness, knew whose footstep it was for which the world waited. He would come—that was their religion, that was the impulse of their life; and, seeing how pure and sweet that life was, who would not wish to share their hope?

He rose at last from the green bank where he had spent the afternoon in meditation. At the cottage door stood his host, waiting to conduct him to the presence of Ivan Levin.

A few steps took him to Levin's door. The door opened, and he saw before him an old man, erect,

strongly built, white-bearded, his brow and cheeks much lined, his eyes searching and visionary.

"Peace be unto you, brother," said Levin. "I know your errand. Come in."

The room was very plain. Upon the table was spread a frugal meal of herbs and bread. A lamp hung from one of the ceiling beams. Its light fell strongly on the old man's face, giving it a Rembrandt effect of homely majesty.

He did not wait for Stockmar's question; he at once began his story. Yes, it was a week ago: the moon was full, and he was alone in his cottage, passing the night in prayer. The dawn was near: and then!—He put out the lamp, and stood at the window, gazing out upon the long village road. Along the road he saw One coming very quietly, as though He trod on wool. He went from door to door, standing before each a moment. Every house was silent; all the people were asleep. He seemed to be looking for some one who did not sleep. As He came down the street toward Levin's house, at last His face was visible. It was pale and calm and sweet, but very awful. It shone like silver in the moonlight. Levin flung wide his door, and stood in it with bowed head and hands outstretched. "Lord, Lord," he murmured, "is it Thou?" "It is I, be not afraid," replied a voice that thrilled him. The figure stood for a moment

opposite Levin's door. Levin dared not look up, but he felt that the eyes of the stranger rested upon him, and his heart burned within him. "Blessed are they who are found watching when their Lord cometh," said the voice. Levin felt as it were a soft touch upon his bowed head, a faint breath, like the stirring of the wind. When he looked up the vision was gone.

"It is so He comes," concluded the old man, in a trembling voice; "first to one, then to another, that He may find who waits for Him; and then when He has numbered His elect, He will come in such a way that all will see Him."

Sincerity, simplicity, a strong manliness of nature breathed in every word of the old man. Stockmar longed to tell him that he also had had his vision, but humility kept him silent. For he knew that, though he had had his vision, he had not waited for it, as this old man had, and therefore he was doubly unworthy to behold it.

Levin lifted his right hand in blessing, "God be with you, brother. The time is short."

The interview was over. Stockmar walked back in silence to the house of his host.

He found the lamps lit, the supper on the table, the family waiting for him. There were beside his host and his wife four children, ruddy-cheeked and sturdy, and an old man and woman. When the meal

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was finished the Bible was produced, and one of the children read from it some passages in English. This was followed by a Russian hymn, very sweet and piercing. After the first verse Stockmar was able to recognise its meaning, and to translate it roughly. As near as he could gather, the words ran :

When the gloom is on the pasture,
And the children have come home,
He will come, He will come.

When the evening star is lighted
In the midnight's temple dome,
He will come, He will come.

When you hear the wind at midnight,
When at dawn the cock crows clear,
He is near, He is near.

With the hands that once so suffered
He will knock upon the door,
Gently knock, and nothing more.

Say not that thou hast not heard Him
Gentle though the knocking be,
It is He, it is He!

Though some may disregard Him,
Slothful some and scornful some,
He will come, He will come.

With the last line of each verse the simple melody rose into a kind of ecstatic cry. When the hymn ceased the little group sat in silence for a few moments, with bowed heads. Then they rose one by

one and went to bed. In another hour complete silence had settled down upon the house.

"And at midnight a great cry was heard. Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet Him!"

Stockmar awoke suddenly from sleep, and sat up in bed, gazing with startled eyes into the semi-darkness of the room. The late and waning moon had now risen, and one slender ray of silver lay across the floor.

"Behold, He cometh: go ye out to meet Him!"

The words were this time distinctly audible; they were not the language of a dream. It was a clear, ringing voice that spoke, evidently in the village street.

Stockmar went to the window, opened it softly, and gazed out. All was very silent; the dark fir trees stood motionless, the plain houses were washed with faint moonshine, the grass glittered with the dew. At first he saw nothing more; then he became aware that other windows had been softly opened, and then doors, and that the whole village was awake. Ten minutes passed; no sound was audible but the tinkle of the little brook flowing down the glen. But the silence was eager; it was laden with significance; it was pregnant with the throb of many beating hearts.

And then it seemed as though the breath suddenly left him, his whole being hung suspended, and a sense of awe, at once profound and exquisite, possessed him. For down the long village street moved such a Figure as Levin had described, walking softly as on wool. He went from door to door, standing before each an instant, as if in mute enquiry and conjecture. And from these doors, as he passed, men and women came out silently, their faces showing pale and tense in the thin moonshine. Yet there was no fear in those faces; only joy unspeakable, and a sort of measureless content. He moved slowly down the village street, they following, and, as He drew nearer, Stockmar saw His face. It was grave and calm; the light seemed to shine out of it rather than upon it; and the eyes were deep with yearning. An atmosphere of soft light moved with Him as He went; His steps woke no echo; His figure cast no shadow. At the end of the village street He turned, and stood for an instant gazing quietly upon the group of men and women who had followed Him. Instinctively they all knelt, and bowed their heads. He stretched out His hands a moment, as if in benediction. A cock crew in the distance, the little brook sang in the glen, the first ripple of dawn ran along the east in a faint wash of gold. And then He vanished out of their sight.

No one moved. There they knelt upon the rough

village street, men, women, children, while the dawn silently overflowed the world.

Then the voice of Ivan Levin was heard in one ecstatic cry:

“He has come, He has come!”

The old man stood in the full rays of the rising sun, his face illumined.

“He has come, He has come!”

The people caught the cry, it passed from lip to lip, at first in low whispers, presently with a shout of joy.

They rose from their knees, their eyes shining, their bosoms heaving, their hands trembling, like persons inebriated with a great happiness. They broke into song:

Say not that thou hast not heard Him,
Gentle though the knocking be,
It is He, it is He!

The hymn, with its half-plaintive, half-triumphant Russian melody, rang out clear and sweet upon the morning air. It rang across the empty prairie like a challenge to the sleeping world.

Stockmar knelt against the open window, no longer watching the people in the street; his lips moved in prayer. For the first time in forty years he prayed. He saw once more the plain German home where he was born, the portrait of Luther

on the wall, the picture of the Good Shepherd with the children at His knees that hung above his bed, his mother's face, and he was a child again with his head upon her knees. And it seemed to him that the Man whom he had thus seen had eyes like his mother's, and that it was upon His knees that his head was now laid, and that it was to Him he sobbed out the confession of a misused life.

And it all seemed entirely natural. It was as though all his life had been always moving towards this hour. He had passed beyond astonishment or surprise. His head lay upon the knees of Christ with such intense satisfaction that it seemed he had always meant to do this thing, that all the time, through all his wanderings, he had foreseen this hour.

The dawn filled the room: he was still praying. And all the while he heard almost unconsciously the hymn caught up by singer after singer in the village street, now growing faint, now swelling out in new triumph:

Say not that thou hast not heard Him,
Gentle though the knocking be,
It is He, it is He!

VIII

IT WILL SHAKE THE WORLD

STOCKMAR returned to New York to find his story had preceded him.

As there was no impending war to be discussed, no murder trial in sight, and no new commercial scandal to absorb the public mind, the papers seized upon the Canora episode with avidity. At first a brief telegram appeared stating that there was much excitement among the Doukhobors, who believed that Christ had at last appeared to them. This telegram was speedily expanded into a series of sensational articles. Reporters flocked to the remote Doukhobor settlement, interviewed Ivan Levin and many other persons, and produced a series of highly coloured articles. Stockmar's presence in the village at the time of the supposed appearance was at once disclosed.

All through the long journey back to New York Stockmar's temper was one of extraordinary exaltation. He ate, drank, and slept like a man in a dream. Between him and his fellow-travellers it was as though a transparent barrier interposed; he

saw them moving to and fro, but they seemed altogether unreal and infinitely removed from him. He sat silent for hours, gazing out upon the flying scroll of fields and farms, but what he really saw was not there; it was the midnight scene in the street of Canora. The rhythm of the rushing wheels wove itself into the rhythm of the Doukhobor hymn; they sang perpetually "*He will come! He will come!*" He lifted the blind of his sleeping berth at midnight, and saw not the sleeping towns, but painted on the sky the face of Ivan Levin, the awed crowd of peasants kneeling in the village street, and, above all, that supreme Figure with hand stretched out in benediction. And as he looked upon the starry sky, in which the waning moon hung low, there came to him again and again the sense that all this was but a blue curtain, hanging on invisible pulleys, and that it might lift at any moment. Once or twice a fellow-traveller spoke to him, but he made no reply. He felt it impossible to shape his speech to the ordinary trivialities of travel. It was as though he had altogether forgotten the language of the world; he was a man apart, a man separated from his kind, who had been caught up into the seventh heaven, and had heard things which it was not lawful for a man to utter.

But as he drew nearer to New York the ordinary human world intruded more and more upon his

senses. As the dawn broke toward the end of his journey he saw the vast line of lighted windows in the electrical manufactories of Schenectady, Albany with its church spires and uplifted Capitol, the Hudson with its little crowded river towns; symbols these of that strenuous life of man which rolls on in its fixed groove, careless of dreamers and their dreams. Here were the gross facts of life as they appeared to most men, the grey implacable ordinariness of common things. How contend against this insolent assertion of itself which material fact made upon the senses? Who should persuade this multitude of men and women, whose lives, rooted in use and custom, exhausted themselves in toil for bodily bread or bodily pleasure, that this was, after all, a spiritual world—that in its silences the feet of God were heard—that above its smoke and din there were peopled abysses of pure space?

Yet he knew that he must speak, and he had not the least wish to escape his duty. And there was, moreover, a feeling in his heart quite new to him: a tenderness of pity for his fellows, who now for the first time were realised as fellows.

O, to save these, to perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all!

For he no longer regarded the meanest man with

disdain; his former scornful estimate of the dull average of mankind had been replaced by a sympathy that was almost painful.

As he neared New York he bought of a newsboy a morning paper, and the first thing that met his eye was a bold headline: "The Doukhobors Find the Messiah." There followed what purported to be a full account of the occurrences at Canora. It was not ill-done; here and there the tone was flippant, but upon the whole it gave a clear and striking account of what had happened, and in the closing paragraph the reporter himself seemed to have been overcome with a sense of awe.

"I went to Canora," ran this paragraph, "entirely prejudiced as any rational man could be against the truth of these alleged manifestations. I do not now allege that I am a believer in them, but I hold the steadfast opinion that something has really happened, and something that was extraordinary. These peasants are by no means fools; they are simple-minded, sincere, and honest, and of quite average intelligence. I am convinced that no one of those to whom I spoke is capable of wilful falsehood. Their agreement as to what they saw, or thought they saw, is absolute. I tested the story again and again, but without being able to shake it on any essential point. I must confess also that the entire atmosphere of the place seemed to

impregnate the mind with the seeds of belief. I know not how to describe what I felt; what I do know is that I entered the place with a profane jest upon my lips, and I left it in a state of awe. It was as if my mind walked on tiptoe."

Stockmar drew a long breath as he read the passage. It exactly described his own feeling. Awe—breathless awe, the mind on tiptoe—yes, that was the right word, and this half-sceptical reporter had realised it, in spite of his habitual cynicism. Somehow that picture of the man with a profane jest upon his lips, suddenly beaten to his knees by a pressure too strong for him to resist, seemed typical of what would happen when the world itself realised the story. They also should see Him; even they who had pierced Him.

And then the last clause of the article caught his eye: "We understand that Rudolf Stockmar, who is widely known as one of our most brilliant critics, was present on the night of these occurrences. He left immediately and is reported on his way to New York. He will be awaited with impatience. It is to him, rather than to Ivan Levin, who appears to be the leader of the Doukhobors, that the world will turn for full information on this mysterious subject."

The train was now nearing New York. The Harlem River was crossed, the long plunge into

the smoke-laden tunnel was over, and there loomed up the vast cavity of the Central Station. As Stockmar passed the barrier a hand was laid upon his arm. He turned quickly and saw Field.

"I have been waiting for you," said the great surgeon. "I calculated you would arrive to-day. In another hour your presence will be known and half the reporters in New York will be at your door. I want you to give me that hour."

"Willingly," said Stockmar. "You are the man of all men I wanted to see. And next to you West. By the way, how's West?"

"West also has been seeing visions," said Field. "Many strange things have happened since you left New York."

The two men entered a carriage and were driven rapidly to Field's home. A bright log fire was burning in Field's private room. The public rooms were already full of patients.

"These must wait," said Field. "You are my chief patient to-day — although I don't know whether I ought not to call myself yours."

He stood close to Stockmar, regarding him with a physician's eye; apparently the diagnosis was satisfactory, for he smiled slightly.

"And now," said he, "before I ask you to speak let me say one word. I have, of course, read in the papers all about Canora. It's hardly too much

to say that millions of eyes are at the present hour turned toward that remote spot. Do you know that there is already a disposition to believe that strange story?"

"I have just read an article written by a reporter who appeared to believe it," said Stockmar. "That is as far as my knowledge goes."

"Well, it is so, incredible as it appears. And among men of the first intellects, too. I can only explain it upon one ground, which is that the reign of materialism is over. The finest minds are sick of it. They have discovered its inadequacy. There is a violent rebound beginning toward the opposite pole, which is the recognition of the supernatural, or perhaps I ought to say, the supersensuous, for I don't admit such a thing as what men are pleased to call the supernatural."

Field paused a moment, and then said, with impressive solemnity: "Do you really understand what this story means—what its effect will be, if it comes to be believed? Why, *it will shake the world!*"

"Yes," said Stockmar simply, "I believe it will."

"Well, that is why I wanted to see you before the reporters got hold of you. I wanted to sift your story thoroughly for myself, before you gave it to the world. Not from personal curiosity, not even from scientific curiosity, though I admit that

the latter motive does exist in me, but because I am overwhelmed with the thought of the tremendous issues which are involved. Now give me every detail, and may God give us both understanding."

Stockmar thereupon told the story of his experiences, from that moment in the Club when the scornful speech was stricken from his lips by the touch of a divine hand to the hour when he saw that same divine hand lifted in benediction over the kneeling Russian peasants in the roadway at Canora. He attempted no explanations; he simply told the story in direct uncoloured language. It was a plain man's statement of plain facts, altogether impressive by its absolute lucidity. Field listened with a face of deepening pallor. Long accustomed to the diagnosis not only of physical but of mental conditions, he watched Stockmar closely while he spoke; but he could discover no single sign of mental aberration. In Stockmar's choice of words, in the orderliness of his narration, in his even tones, in his complete self-control, there was abundant evidence that the perfect poise of his intellect was undisturbed. If it had been otherwise, Field would not have been surprised. Indeed, he half suspected some proof of mental aberration, and that was not the least reason why he desired to see Stockmar immediately on his arrival. When Stockmar finished, Field was not only filled

with wonder—he was relieved of a torturing anxiety, and his first word was a low-breathed “Thank God.”

It was some time before either man spoke. Each felt the moment too tremendous for the lighter forms of speech; each felt in vain for those deeper words which the occasion needed. It was Stockmar who spoke first. “Field,” he said, “do you believe it?”

Field rose from his chair, and walked up and down the room in silence, with head bowed upon his breast. When he spoke at last it was in the nature of a soliloquy. He appeared to have forgotten the presence of Stockmar; he spoke as a man alone, reasoning with himself.

“Who says it cannot be? I tell you all things are possible in a world where every door opens on the infinite. Let but one door stand ajar out of myriads—Eternity comes rushing in. ‘I am the Door’—yes, He said that—God’s open door—a life turning on a secret hinge. Behold I have opened a door, and no man shall close it. No, because man does not know the secret of the hinge. I am—well, what am I? I am a rationalistic mystic. My reason says this and that can’t happen; something else, my mysticism, says that it can. Well, then, in little things I will obey my reason, but not in the great things. Here, too, is a thing that

weighs: they say He rose from the dead. They piled the world against the door, but it opened, after all, in spite of them. If that could happen, anything can happen. To conquer death must needs be the greatest thing of all; after that it were an easy thing to conquer time and space. 'I have the keys of death and Hades'—can't He then unlock the door of one small world, if He wills to?—of course He can. He has the keys. Yes: it must be so; that is reasonable, isn't it? Isn't this what faith is, a reason above reason—a kind of vision? Stockmar has it. West has it, too. O, my God, cannot I reach out to it——"

He stopped suddenly in his restless walk. Then it was as though the perplexity upon his face slowly dissolved like a mist upon the hills. It was succeeded by a shining brightness. He approached Stockmar, laid his hand upon his shoulder, looked long into his eyes.

"'Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe,'" he said, in a low voice. "Stockmar, I believe."

An hour had passed; it had seemed but a moment. Field was the first to recognise the flight of time.

"We must part now," he said. "How strange to take up the common things of life again. It feels like falling from a balloon; this moment the

stars and the measureless spaces, the next the dull earth. But no; that's not true, either. It is the earth He chose to tread; it is there we meet Him, not among the stars. He also healed the sick."

He paused, and once more fell into the mood of rapt soliloquy.

"The dull earth!—ah, that is where we have all made our mistake. If we have found it dull, it is because we have shut God out of it. We have taken the keys of knowledge God gave us, and have used them not to unlock the door for His entrance, but to lock Him out. And yet in every age there have been some who have suspected their mistake—what a rethey but the whispers of frightened children. Look at it—occultism, spiritualism, wizardry—what are they but the whispers of frightened children at a closed door—sublime guesses, suspicions, interrogations,—the sense of something in the dark that moves, lives—the sense of something in one's own heart that communicates with that unknown force or Presence,—and, after all, that Presence not an unkindly one—not one to be feared—only Jesus—trying to get into a world which has thrust Him out. That's how men feel. Shut up in materialism, are they? Yes, but not content with it. Always searching the dark for some little chink through which the light shines. I know myself and I know my kind. Stockmar, I tell you the world is ready

for your vision; readier than you or I can guess. This arrogant New York, it is not really arrogant. Listen to its secret wailing, its falling tears; and what is it it says in the secret hours when none can spy upon its anguish? 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him'—that is what it says. And to that dim host of weeping, supplicating people you come, and say: 'I know He is not dead. I have seen Him.' Ah, if they believe you—and I think they will—this is the greatest hour in all the history of the world.—Yes, this story once believed will shake the world."

"But there!" he added, with a return to his habitual voice and manner. "Who is sufficient for these things? Forgive this eruption of speech. Strange measureless thoughts seem sweeping over me like clouds, and among them I grope in vain for language. Go now, my friend. New York waits for you, the whole world waits. May God give you strength to witness to the truth."

He put his arm round Stockmar's shoulder in affectionate farewell. "There are three of us," he said softly—"you, West, and I—Peter, John, and Thomas called Didymus.—Three were enough then, three will be enough now—to say nothing of the disciples at Canora. And it's the same world after all; above all, it's the same Master."

"Yes," thought Stockmar, as he drove through the glittering New York streets to his home, "that is true; the same world, but the same Master."

In that hour there came to him for the first time the acquaintance with his true vocation. Hitherto he had been passive, recipient. He had been adjusting his own personality to a new range of perception. But that process was now over. Henceforth he must be a witness to the truth. He was the custodian of a message to the world. The thought humbled him, but it also invigorated him. It was like the call of a trumpet, stirring the fibre of the soldier in him. And he obeyed the call without the least thought of remonstrance, as he had long before obeyed the battle bugle at Gravelotte. Those brief moments marked the hour of his dedication.

He reached his rooms, to find them, as Field had warned him, thronged with reporters. They were for the most part a boyish throng. They spoke eagerly and quickly, and yet beneath their buoyant manner it was easy to discern a real seriousness. To them he told the story of Canora with the same directness and simplicity of manner which Field had found so noticeable.

Then came the inevitable question: "And do you really believe all this?"

"I believe it absolutely," was his answer.

"It will be hard to make New York believe it," ventured one of his questioners.

"I don't know about that," said another. "When I left the office this morning the old man had an open Bible on his desk. I've never seen one there before."

"Do you never read your Bibles?" said Stockmar.

"I guess we used to," said one youth.

"Begin to read them again," he replied.

As he looked upon the little crowd of boyish faces, for the most part so frank, though already somewhat worn with the fever of the city, his heart warmed to them. "Let me read you something before you go," he said. And there and then he began to read the story of Christ's death and resurrection, and from this turned back to the solemn words of Jesus in His last conversations with His followers—the definite assertion that death could not interrupt His life, the definite promise of a visible return to earth, the great Parable of the Ten Virgins, the yet greater Parable of the Final Judgment as given by St. Matthew. They had each, no doubt, heard these solemn passages read in church a hundred times; but as Stockmar read them, somehow they seemed new and real. Through them the man's own indomitable faith penetrated; mixed with them were broken rays of vision from

Canora—Ivan Levin at his prayers, the Doukhobor hymn, the midnight coming of the Christ, knocking on the closed doors. They listened in profound attention. One or two bowed their heads—poor lads, the memory of home was working in them; all were quite reverent. When Stockmar finished one and another thanked him.

“God bless you,” he replied. “Come and see me when you like. Don’t wait the next time for your papers to send you.”

Then they left the room, and Stockmar was alone.

Alone? nay: never was he so sure of a Presence with him as through the hours of that long afternoon.

And outside in New York the words that he had spoken were being circulated far and wide. Business men, hurrying to the cars, caught the glaring headlines, bought the papers, and stood at the street corners reading them, indifferent to the loss of time. Clerks, stenographers, artisans, fashionable women, even the loungers of the clubs, were all absorbed in the same moment by the same printed words. They were startled, they were stupefied. It was very strange. What; was there something real in religion, after all? They lifted curious thoughtful eyes to the spires of the many churches, outlined against the dim evening skies. These unlighted

silent buildings—were they, after all, the temples of some sacred mystery, did they hide within their gloom some supreme secret? Strange, if this were so, that they had said so little of it. Then this was miraculous, and miracles did not happen; had not the very priests of these dark churches, who ought to know, said so a thousand times? And so some read the paper angrily and thrust it from them, only to read it yet again. And some smiled scornfully, and some read with empty wonder. But more defined than even scorn or wonder, was a little wave of fear that began to rise about men's hearts. It was as yet but a ripple, but it grew; a cold wave of apprehension that quenched thoughtless gaiety, and put out the fires of folly.

New York slept uneasily that night.

IX

BUT SOME DOUBTED

NEW YORK slept, woke, wondered; slept again, and woke yet again to find the Canora story still strongly focussed in the public vision.

In the ordinary course the story would have been a day's wonder—no more, and then would have been submerged in the usual flood of newspaper trivialities.

But this story, so positive, so clearly witnessed, was not to be lightly dismissed. It was discussed everywhere, and for the most part with seriousness. One learned man came forward with a theory that the whole thing might be explained by suggestion. No one need question the sincerity of the witnesses, but who were they? Ivan Levin, the common type of the religious enthusiast. It is he who conceives the vision; it is he who works upon the imagination of his followers by his predictions until at last they are wrought into a state of eager anticipation. Nothing was commoner than for men to see what they expected to see. It is a case of self-hypnotism.

Then comes Stockmar, for whose intellectual qualities and learning every one should have respect. But, by his own confession, Stockmar had suffered from some strange seizure, which in all probability predisposed him to hallucinations. In his interview with Levin the effect of suggestion is clearly traceable. Then comes the climax which any acute psychologist might have anticipated. A whole community, among whom there is but one man of education, accustomed to the laws of evidence, the rest ignorant peasants, suddenly believes that it beholds an actual vision of Christ.

The theory was plausible, and no doubt proved soothing to many minds not acute enough to perceive that the resurrection of Christ itself—that central fact of all the Christian faith—might be explained away upon just the same terms. It was a theory that, if it were true, proved too much; and for that reason it carried no weight with men of genuine intelligence.

Then another learned man propounded a yet subtler theory. So far as it could be understood—and it was not altogether easy of comprehension—it assumed that there were certain periodic disturbances of the world's atmosphere which had a great effect on persons of abnormal imaginative sensitiveness. During such disturbances sounds might be transmitted with unusual clearness, or the physical

vision might be sharpened into abnormal activity. Thus there was a well-known legend very popular in Flanders, that Christ had actually appeared, and had walked upon the waters, during a great storm off the coast of Ostend; but the key to the story was found beyond doubt in the storm itself, in the turmoil of the sea and sky, and in the fear which they produced.

But to this theory men paid less heed than to the other; for there was no proof of atmospheric disturbance at Canora, but on the contrary a condition of complete tranquillity.

And then there was West's story, for this too had found its way into the papers. Here, indeed, there was no allegation of the supernatural or the super-sensuous; but in five minutes' speech with a complete stranger the temper of West's mind had been completely altered. Who was this stranger? No one had seen him enter the church; no one had seen him leave it. It was as though he had stepped out of the bodiless air, and returned again to it.

And over and above these things there was something else which was full of significance. As a prairie fire springs up at a dozen points at once, so all over the world the flame of faith in the immediate coming of Christ had suddenly appeared. Thronged churches were reported in Rome, and throughout Italy the shrines of popular saints were

crowded. In London, a famous preacher, speaking beneath the dome of St. Paul's, had startled his hearers by a declaration of his faith in the immediate judgment of the world. In the Southern States of America, among the coloured people, there was strange religious unrest. There were vast gatherings for song and prayer; a wave of ecstatic revivalism began to roll across the country, and the plough stood neglected in the fields, the throb of joyous life was silent in the cities. Even among the tribes of the desert strange movements were reported, and although no one could accurately describe or explain them, every one knew that they had their origin in some profound religious emotion. So, over all the world, there seemed to brood some influence at once awful and unspeakable. No one could define it, for few dared to analyse it, but all felt it—a weight of solemn dread that had suddenly descended on the world, and hushed its clamour to a waiting stillness.

Perhaps the strangest thing of all was that amid this immense whispering of fear which had invaded a million homes, the Church remained absolutely silent. Leading ministers of New York, interviewed by various papers, refused to commit themselves to any definite opinions. The Sunday came round, the people waited for a sign, but from the great majority of these pulpits no sign came.

“Can it be,” remarked one leading journal, “that the Church which has for ages, in its creeds, its liturgies, its teachings, and its hymns, affirmed the actual coming of Christ to judge the world,—can it be that the Church has all the time affirmed as truth that which was to itself an impossibility or a lie? It is a strange situation. A number of people in the world suddenly affirm as fact that which the Church has long taught as doctrine; but instead of receiving this unexpected testimony with gratitude and triumph, the Church has not a word to say. It maintains an obstinate silence, which can only be interpreted as the symbol of its incredulity, or perhaps of its sense of offence.”

Certainly the Church showed no sign of receiving Stockmar’s testimony with either gratitude or triumph. The fact was that the leaders of the Church were bewildered. And because they were bewildered they temporised.

Thus there came to West’s house one morning old Dr. Littleton, his predecessor in the pastorate. Dr. Littleton had long since retired from active work, and had taken up in his old age the studies which he had abandoned in his prime. He had always taken a fatherly interest in West. At first he had given but a qualified approval of West’s opinions, although he had never wavered in his high

appreciation of West's abilities. But as time went on his own opinions had suffered a change. His release from the pastorate before the mind was dulled had given him the opportunity for the retired life of scholarship which he had always coveted secretly; but it had also had another effect upon him, of which he was but dimly conscious. When he was in the pastorate he was constantly forced to test the value of his thinking by its effect upon the minds of ordinary men. What were mere theories worth, if they were unintelligible to the minds of ordinary men? These were the men he had to help and instruct if he could, and to do so, he had to bring his mind within their range of apprehension. The result was wholesome. He constantly corrected his own thought by the average thought of his people, as a watch is corrected by the common time.

But with his retirement from the pastorate the process was reversed. He now lived in the sole company of his own thoughts, and the opportunity of correcting these thoughts by commerce with practical life was gone. He had soon reached the condition when all truth is thought and not belief. In other words, all truth was debatable, and had for its sole organ the intelligence.

The old man shook hands heartily with West. His first question was "Where's Helen?" for

Helen had always been a favourite of his, and he had treated her as a daughter.

"She's quite well, I believe," said West.

"I believe—eh? What's that mean? Isn't she here?"

"No, she's gone away."

"Gone away? Gone home for a visit, I suppose?"

"I may as well tell you the truth at once," said West. "She has gone home to stay. She has left me."

"Why," said the old man, in a shocked voice, "this is very dreadful. Pray, what has happened?"

"She has acted entirely within her rights," said West, "and I cannot blame her. She entirely disapproves of my—well, let us say my views. She felt her intellectual honour compromised by remaining with me, and so she has gone."

"But do you mean to say that any kind of view you have is more to you than your wife? You will lose your wife for a view? Why, this is mere mid-summer madness. My dear fellow, you can't be in earnest."

"I am entirely in earnest," said West. "Dr. Littleton, I fear I cannot make my position clear to you, but do please try to understand me. I have come to believe certain things as true—absolutely

true. Helen could not believe them. I had to choose between her and the truth. What could I do but choose the truth?"

The old man was greatly disturbed.

"You certainly can't make that position intelligible to me," he said. "Why, what is truth? No truth is absolute; all truth is relative—you know that well enough. I wouldn't give a row of pins for the finest abstract truth the human mind ever conceived, if it meant the rupture of love, the sacrifice of fidelity to spoken vows, an outrage on old sacred affections. No, sir, God made us to love one another, not to quarrel about thoughts and views."

"Surely God meant us also to buy the truth and sell it not—even for the sweet bribe of the tenderest affection, Dr. Littleton?"

"Ah, I begin to get a little light upon this problem," said the old man, with acerbity. "I've read all this stuff about you in the papers, and I took leave to believe it false. Do you mean to tell me, Francis West, that at your time of life, with your mind and training, you've become a mere crack-brained fanatic—that you've let that sweet woman go out of your life all on account of some irrational illusion with which you have taken up?"

"Isn't that begging the question?" said West. "What you call illusion I call truth. Dr. Littleton, will you let me put a question to you?"

"A hundred, if you please," said the old man, in a harsh voice.

"Well, let us say two or three—they will serve," said West, with a wan smile.

"Do you believe, Dr. Littleton, that Jesus Christ did actually promise to appear again on earth, visibly I mean, and as a person?"

"Of course I do."

"Did not the entire early Church accept that promise in its plain significance?"

"I suppose so."

"Then what has happened to make that promise void? Ought not we to hold the same belief? How can we dispense with that belief without dishonouring our Lord and breaking with the great historical tradition of Christianity?"

"I am afraid I don't quite follow you," said the old man.

"Yet the sequence of thought is clear," said West.

"Clear?—yes, if you are a mere literalist."

"I am literalist enough to accept plain words in their plain meaning," said West.

"And it is just at this point I join issue," said Littleton. "The words are not plain; they are vague symbolic utterances. They were never intended to be taken in their literal meaning. That was where the early Christians were mistaken.

After a century or two they found out their mistake. The generations passed and the heavens gave no sign. Then they turned their thoughts to earth. They found they had a vast and powerful organisation called the Church, and they bent their energies to making this organisation the most potent weapon that was ever forged for the control of human life and conduct. Of course they kept up a kind of faith in a second coming of Christ, it was a tremendous threat which was necessary to their power, and they sang their *Dies Iræ*, and so forth."

"Yes, they sang their *Dies Iræ*, and sold indulgences for sin," broke in West. "They would never have done that if they had really believed in a Christ who would be their judge. All apostasies of the Church have sprung from that unbelief. And as it has been through the ages, so it is to-day. We sing the *Dies Iræ* too—as a musical performance. We don't sell indulgences for sin, but we let rich men buy or bribe the Church, which is much the same thing. And when plain men come to us with their Bibles in their hands, and say, 'Look, Jesus Christ said this or that,' we reply, 'Yes, but He didn't mean it. He spoke in symbols, you know.' And when these plain men go away perplexed and sorrowful, we call them ignorant, and we despise them; and we call ourselves wise because we have dissolved plain truth into a mist of equivocal and lying

words. Dr. Littleton, is it not true that the great mass of the plain people have ceased to come to church, and is not the real reason this, that they believe us, the ministers of the Church, untruthful?"

"Stop, stop!" cried the old man angrily. "I will not hear you slandering yourself and the Church you serve."

"Is it slander?" said West quietly. "Consider what it is that we have done, these many years—you, I, almost all of us. A plain man takes his Gospels, opens them, reads them, feels them true, and is thrilled and alarmed by what he finds in them. He comes to us with his alarms, and what do we say to him? 'Why,' we say, 'you are in error, and have read your Bible wrongly.' 'Show me where I am wrong,' he says. 'I find it said here that Jesus is God. Is not that true?' 'It is a symbol of truth,' we reply; 'what is really meant is that Jesus is a good man, indeed the best of men, and therefore in a sense the divinest.' 'But it is said He wrought many miracles: is not that true?' 'O, people thought it true at the time,' we reply, 'and of course something happened; but certainly it did not happen as it is recorded here.' 'But it is said He rose from the dead: is not that true?' 'Well, His soul rose from the dead, every soul does, you know; but this part of the story as it stands is only poetry

and symbol.' 'I see,' says the plain man at last; 'it is all poetry and symbol. But do you know, sir, it looks to me very like lying?' Then the plain man goes away, quite relieved of all his fears. These things that had alarmed him had really nothing in them, after all. It is true Jesus spoke of a future judgment, but then He didn't mean it, and even if He did, He was probably mistaken. It is true He said, 'Sell all thou hast and give to the poor,' but clearly He could not have meant that, for no one thinks of doing it, however pious he may be. And it is true He talked of coming again, but since no one expects Him, and least of all His Church, it is clear that these were idle words. Presently the plain man hears us lamenting that he will not come to church, and he says coarsely, 'Well, why should I? You have nothing to teach me, and you can't help me. Why, you don't yourselves believe the things you say; you use words with double meanings, and there is no truth in you. Thank you for nothing. I won't come!'

"Dr. Littleton, can you honestly declare that in saying these things I utter slander?"

"Well, if not slander, madness," said the old man. "Slander presupposes sanity."

"I am sorry you are angry, and that your anger makes you unjust," said West.

"I am not unjust," he retorted. "It is you who

are unjust in what you choose to say about your brethren in the ministry. The ministers of the Christian Church to-day are a noble body of men, They have a very difficult task to perform. They have to interpret Christian truth in modern forms, —it is by these means alone they can make it intelligible. You can't make a scientific age believe in things which passed unquestioned among Galilean fishermen. To claim authority for unintelligible statements is suicidal."

"Yes, I know," said West, "how difficult is the task of interpreting Christian truth in modern forms. I also know what the process involves—the complete capitulation sooner or later, of the soul to the intellect, the spiritual intuition to the reason. The question in my mind is whether the modern minister is really called upon to attempt this process; whether it originates in any higher motive than his own pride of intellect."

"He must do it to get a hearing," Littleton replied.

"Must he? Ah, I thought so once, but I have discovered my mistake. Can you deny, my dear Doctor, that the Church has lost authority in these days, that its authority never stood so low as now? Have you asked why? I have many times. The question has been a torture to me."

"Well?" said the old man grimly.

"I think I have found the true answer at last. It is this very effort to interpret Christian truth in modern forms which has cost the Church its authority. Men respect convictions. Men will both respect and obey a Church which confronts them with plain, direct, authoritative declarations of truth, even though this truth contradicts the reason. But men will neither respect nor obey a Church which spends its time in explaining truth away. The plain man looks for plain and unequivocal statements from those who profess to be his spiritual teachers and masters. Subtlety distresses him, mental reservation enrages him. There is only one method by which the Church can win the world: command it—don't apologise to it."

Littleton rose from his seat, pushing it from him with an angry gesture.

"I see we shall never agree," he said. "And be quite sure of it none of your brethren will agree with you."

"But the plain men will, I think."

"The plain men—obscurantists, literalists, fanatics, people without intelligence; I hope you may like their company. God forgive me, but I think I would rather see you dead than in such company. I don't wonder Helen left you."

The thought of Helen suddenly softened the old man's heart toward West. Surely the whole thing

must be a dream, some dreadful nightmare that vanishes before the first ray of light. They had been so happy together—Francis and Helen. He had been present at their marriage; he had watched their lives; he had the pride of a father in their happiness. And for West's mind, with its subtlety and clearness, its broad range and quick apprehension, he had felt more than admiration. What was this strange force which had in an instant come between the husband and wife, driving them apart? And as he realised the tragedy of it all, anger left him, and pity took its place.

"West," he said, in a trembling voice, "I think you know I love you. Forgive me, if I have spoken to you harshly. I spoke with the freedom of a father. I can't understand you, but I have never known you fail in truth. Tell me from your heart, as in the presence of God, are you so sure of your position that you can't turn back?"

"I am, sir. I can't turn back."

"Not even for Helen? Give me but one ground for hope, even the smallest. I will go to her, I will bring her back with me. It can't be that an opinion can separate those who truly love each other."

"This is not an opinion. It is something the surest of the sure, the clearest of the clear. It is an absolute conviction."

"Conviction of what?"

"That Jesus Christ has spoken to me—has given me a command—told me certain things that I must do.—If it meant death, I must do them. If it means the death of love, still I must do them."

"Certain things. What things?"

"Briefly, that He is coming—His manifestation is at hand, and I must witness for Him to an apostate Church—to a Church in which I, alas, have long lived as an apostate."

"I do not understand," the old man said sadly. "I have tried to walk in the light of truth all my days, but this seems to me not light, but the dark cloud of a great delusion. I thought the world had passed out of the range of such delusions for ever. It seems I am back again in the Middle Ages. O, can't I do something to help you?"

"You can pray for me, sir. Yes, and there is something else I would like you to do. Go to Helen, and tell her my love for her is quite unchanged—that——"

He broke down at that word. He sat at the table as on the night when she had left him, his face covered with his hands, tears oozing through his locked fingers.

"That Christ understands all about it," he added. "Only I must love Him first. 'He that loveth wife or child more than Him is not worthy of Him.'"

"God help you, my son. I see I cannot. Alas, I can only vex you."

And so Dr. Littleton left him: shaken in his emotions, but not in his opinions. The old man marched off sturdily upon the road of his negations, finding in its hard, dry light all the invigoration that his nature needed. He did not notice the barrenness of the landscape, he did not feel the chill of the air. Nor was he aware that no flowers of faith grew by the wayside, and that the atmosphere had no perfume.

X

MERCY LANE

AFTER Dr. Littleton left him West sat a long time thinking over the details of their interview. It saddened him that a man of Littleton's purity of life and strength of character should be hostile to him, and he sought earnestly for a reason. At last that reason grew distinct to him. Did not Jesus Himself say that unless a man became as a little child he could not enter into the Kingdom of God? It was clear, then, that Jesus was thoroughly aware that His ideas could only be received by minds that were childlike, that is, were simple. The more thoroughly the mind was saturated with the wisdom of men, the more unintelligible to it would become those divine ideas which owed nothing to worldly wisdom, everything to an inner light. Littleton had ample wisdom, of the intellectual kind, but he had lost the inner light. And as it was with Littleton so it was with great numbers of his brethren in the ministry; they no longer lived by the inner light. Here, then, lay the materials of his own resolve. Whatever happened of derision or con-

tempt he was safe so long as he lived by the inner light, and he could be safe in no other way. To know Christ must mean for him, as it had meant for Paul, the abandonment of all other knowledge; at least of any trust in any other kind of knowledge.

These thoughts, fragmentary as they were, and not altogether clear, nevertheless were of great service to him. For he had promised on the evening of this day to address his congregation, and hitherto he had been uncertain what course he ought to take. He saw now, in a flash of light, that the only thing he could do was to confess his faith. That was all that Paul did, all that the first Apostles did. They had become children in nothing so much as this that they scorned all argument, and indeed, seemed incapable of argument. They were children also in their quiet assumption that what interested them must needs interest the whole world. And it was by these weapons they conquered. Coming with their fresh childish wonder-story into the presence of men sated with worldly wisdom, they first charmed them by their simplicity, then convinced them by their sincerity, and finally turned the whole world back to a new childhood. Might not the same thing happen again, since the same causes in every age produce the same effects?

As the afternoon drew on, he had another visitor. The Church of the Redemption was not wholly self-

centred; upon a small scale it did some philanthropic work in one of the poorer districts of the city. It was done, however, rather as a salve to conscience than upon any general impulse of social altruism. It was never difficult to get money for the work, but it had always been impossible to find voluntary workers. It was better to do the work in this way, no doubt, than not to do it at all, but it was a poor way. Persons of the order of Mrs. Lorimer were always willing to give money, but they would have been affronted had personal service been requested of them. The plan adapted therefore had been the employment of certain paid agents to do the work, and among them was Mercy Lane, who usually called at this hour every week to render her report.

Mercy Lane was a very quiet person. She spoke in a low voice, moved with a gliding softness, had an air of precision, and did her work with method and patient thoroughness. She dressed always in sober colours, which admirably suited the sweet gravity of her demeanour. She had no beauty; her features were unnoticeable, except for the eyes, which were of an unusual clear hazel, and the sweetness of her smile. Her hair was light brown, parted in the middle, and drawn back in two long waves from a low broad forehead. In all her intercourse with West she had not uttered twenty words that

were not connected with her work. What her opinions were, what her character was like, what kind of personality was concealed beneath her grave precise manners—of these things West knew nothing. She entered his library once a week at the same hour, made her reports, took her money, and glided out again, making no more impression on his mind than a soft white cloud makes in its passage over a clear and empty sky.

She stood before him now, and as she opened her notebook, and began to make her usual weekly statement, West, for the first time, found himself a little curious about her. Because a new belief had come to mean so much to him, he began to wonder what the beliefs of this quiet woman might be, what was her history, what was her attitude to life. He listened to her statement with mechanical attention; she had put up her notebook and was about to go, when he said, "Miss Lane, won't you sit down a moment, and tell me some of the details of your work, the sort of things you don't include in these admirable reports of yours?"

She smiled gravely. "Of course I will if you wish it, Dr. West, but I didn't know you were interested in such things as these."

"The reproach is merited," he answered.

"O, I did not mean to reproach you—that was only my awkward way of putting it. What I meant

was that you are busy always with the affairs of the church and your own thoughts, that you couldn't be supposed to have time to think much about such work as mine. It's very humble work, and much the same week after week. I climb so many hundred stairs, enter so many rooms, try to make a few sick people comfortable, sometimes wash the baby for a poor mother, or even scrub the floor, and give a little money, and that is about all."

"And yet you keep interested?"

"Why, of course," she said simply. "Interest indeed is not the right word; I should use a stronger, and say fascinated."

"Are the people so unusual, then?"

"No, not unusual—there are too many of them for that. But they are so brave, so patient. They rarely complain, not even the poorest of them. And they are so grateful for a little help. They are not very clean, they have many faults, and they often fall into sad sins, and yet I sometimes think they are the only really good people in the world."

"That's saying a good deal, isn't it?" said West, with a sympathetic smile.

"I suppose it does sound a little strange, and perhaps I ought not to have said it. What I mean is that, measured by the meagreness of their opportunity, they are really much better men and women than those who have much larger opportunities.

They have not much religion, it is true; that is, the kind of religion which consists in thoughts about religion; but the few things they do believe are so real to them. I often feel that I get much more good from them than I impart to them."

She flushed with the sense of her own forwardness of speech. It was against all her habits to speak much of herself, and this little piece of self-revelation seemed an indiscretion. She lived in a kind of rich silence for the most part, quite untroubled by lack of communication with her fellows. But there was something new in West's manner this morning that had drawn her out of her usual reticence.

On the other hand, West himself was newly conscious of a bond of sympathy between himself and this quiet woman. He wondered what her history had been, and whether he might dare to question her about it. He remembered that she had come somewhere from the South, of course with excellent testimonials, and he thought he had heard at the time of her introduction to him that she came of a good family. If this were so, it was strange that she had sought and made no friendships in the church. How had she come to take up this work?

"I have no right to ask you," he said at last, "but I would really like to know how you came to be interested in this work. You need not answer me unless you like."

"I would rather not answer except in general terms."

"Pray, don't answer me at all unless you feel yourself absolutely free to do so."

"O, but I wish to answer," she replied, with emphasis. "Briefly it all grew out of an experience. I suppose the Methodists would say I 'found religion.' What really happened was this. I had never lived a really frivolous life, but I awoke one day with a shock to find that the things that had been of most interest to me were all empty. Life seemed to me without substance, mere woven air. Then one day, at the Communion service in the church I attended I heard the words read 'This do, in remembrance of Me'; and I instantly saw that the only right way of living was to do the things that Jesus did, remembering Him, and all the while conscious that He was near you. Some things I couldn't do—that was clear. I was not wise, for instance: I had no gift of speech; I could never instruct others. But there was one thing I could do: I could go about doing good, and that seemed to me the greatest thing of all. So I took the nearest way that lay open to me, and in the kind of life I lead I have found ever since an exquisite delight."

"Yet you live amid much misery, Miss Lane."

"Ah, but amidst much love, too; yes, and much

heroism, much faith. I have just left the bedside of a poor bedridden girl—but——”

She suddenly became embarrassed, as if she had said too much.

“But what?” said West, with gentle insistence.

“I was going to say another thing I ought not to say. It was that you could not possibly know what this love and faith of the suffering mean unless you see it for yourself.”

“And why not see it?” said West. “Why should I not go with you, and see for myself?”

“Will you really do so?” she said, with evident pleasure. “I never dared to ask you.”

“And in saying that you reproach me—and deservedly. I ought long ago to have seen your work for myself. If you will allow me, I will go with you at once.”

“O, I shall be so glad,” she replied. “It will mean so much to these poor people. And something to me, too,” she added, “to know that there is a more vital bond between us than these dry reports.” She rose as she spoke. She had drawn off her glove to sign the receipt for her money, and West’s eye was suddenly attracted by her hand. It was a slender hand, beautifully modelled, very delicate and strong; but it was sadly disfigured. The skin was reddened; there was the mark of what seemed a burn on the right finger, and the joints were slightly

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swollen. West withdrew his eyes swiftly with the shamed sense of having surprised a secret. "I sometimes wash the baby for a poor mother, or even scrub the floor"—the words rang upon his ear. There came to his memory a poem he had once read of a child to whom a dying mother had confided the care of four younger children: and how the child's hands grew calloused with her toil for them, and how she grew prematurely old, "as on those slender shoulders the burdens of life were rolled." And then the child dies, and is troubled because she has never been to church, and says to her child friend,

I've been so tired of nights,
I couldn't think to pray.
And now when I see the Lord Jesus,
Whatever will He say?

'And her wise friend replies,

I wouldn't say a word, dear,
For sure He understands,
I wouldn't say a word at all,
But, Mary—*just show Him your hands.*

And then in the same sequence of thought, he saw his mother as she lay dead, and remembered that which touched him most was her folded hands—hands always busy for others, which he had never before seen in repose—and how upon her finger were the marks made by the long toils of the needle.

His eyes filled with hot tears. "Show Him your hands"—Ah, Mercy Lane might—but dared he? And at once those scars upon her hands became sacred disfigurements, and he wondered whether when Christ Himself lifted up His hands to bless the people, those hands also did not show where the tools of the carpenter's shop had left their hurts and wounds. It seemed to him in that moment that he would rather have scrubbed a floor for some many-childed weary mother than have preached a century of sermons.

He went with Mercy Lane to the dim and crowded tenement district where she worked. All the way he was thinking of those scarred hands. He did not attempt to renew the conversation with her, except to ask her once if she had made any friends in the church.

"None," she replied. "I have not felt the need of any."

"But wouldn't it be a pleasure for you to know some of the ladies of the church?"

"I think not," she replied. "They would not understand me, and I am quite sure I should not be at home with them. Please don't think I speak proudly or cynically. It is not that; it is simply that I know that they and I live by irreconcilable ideals."

He made no reply, for he knew how true the words were. But he saw, with the same emotional

intensity with which he had seen other things that day, how irreconcilable the ideals of Mercy Lane were with the ideals of that crowd of women of whom Mrs. Lorimer was typical. For Mercy Lane Christ and His commands were real; for those other women a mere æsthetic legend.

He stood at the bedside of the poor girl whom Mercy Lane had wished him to see. She was a frail, attenuated creature; she had been three years in bed, slowly dying. An old mother, whose cheeks still bore the faded bloom of country breeding, waited on her with a devotion quite unconscious of itself. What struck him most in this interview was the curiously realistic way in which the sick girl spoke of Christ. She appeared to see Him all the time, as some one quite near and real. There was no pretence in this kind of speech, no trace of the jargon of the mission-hall. It appeared to be the natural expression of her normal thought.

"I am waiting for Him to come for me, and take me home," she said.

"Yes," said her mother, "that's what she is always saying. She never complains—do you, honey?"

"Why should I, mother? I have every comfort, far, far more than I deserve. And I am very happy."

Mercy Lane looked at him as the poor girl said

these words, and he read the message of her glance. What fortitude was here, what faith! Here also was the victory of the child-like mind, drawing the strength of all its heroism from the vivid sense of a real Jesus, with her through all her hours of pain—waiting to bear her far away to some country of repose and bliss, when her soul was perfected through suffering. Was anything in his own late experience, or anything in the story of Canora, more wonderful than what he saw here? The scene was commonplace enough in all its human details. In just such rooms as these, and under just such circumstances, myriads of human creatures had suffered through the ages, and myriads suffered now. But in this room there was something that went beyond the human, that rose above it, that cast a soft, transfiguring light upon the bare, crude details of pain and poverty. And what was this something but the presence of Christ? What other thought had ever had such transfiguring and uplifting power in it? He knew now what Mercy Lane meant when she said that she received more good from the poor than she imparted, and the thought came to him that, had Dr. Littleton dwelt much in scenes like these, he would not have found his mind so hostile to the thought of a second coming of Christ.

And this thought brought another: What would

Mercy Lane have to say to these things, to the story of Canora, to his own experiences?

All at once he felt a strong desire to know what her thoughts might be. The pain that he had felt in Littleton's hostility, the significant silence of the leaders of the churches, his own new perception of how the child-like mind stood related to religious truth—all these things made him eager to understand the workings of such a soul as Mercy Lane's. She had had an experience—so she said—which had changed her life. What was of more importance, she was having an experience every day which few persons had. And as he looked at that quiet face, as he remembered those disfigured hands, he instinctively felt that she possessed some deep spiritual secret which had been hidden from him.

As they went down the dark tenement stairs together, he laid his hand upon her arm, and said, "Miss Lane, if you knew a way in which you could help me, would you do it?"

"Of course I would," she replied, "But I can hardly imagine any way in which I could be of help to you."

"I think I can show you one," he replied. "But first let me explain. I want you to think of me as a seeker after truth. Something has happened to my life which has knocked out the very pivot of all my old ways of thought."

"I know," she said, in a low voice. "I read about it in the paper."

"Then you know how I feel. I have to build up new thoughts, to adjust myself to a new range of perception. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I have known in my own life what this means."

"Thank you. That is the very point I am coming to. You told me an hour ago that there was a day in your life when you woke to find life empty, mere woven air. But you did not tell me what produced that impression. Would you mind telling me this also? I ask because I think you can help me by relating it."

At these words her face flushed, and paled. Its repose was gone; life, intense and vivid, looked out from it.

They were standing in the doorway of the tenement.

"Won't you come back with me to my house?" said West.

"No," she said decisively. "If I speak at all, I must speak at once. It means breaking the skin of an old wound—opening it up again. And I am not a brave woman: at least not brave enough to endure the postponement of certain pain."

"I was wrong," said West, "to ask you. I did not understand. Forgive me."

"No, you were right. If I did not feel that, be sure nothing you could say would make me speak."

He bowed his head, and said, "Go on, then."

"It is, alas! a very common story in its human details," she said, with a kind of bitter pathos. "I grew up in a wide house where the one thought was pleasure; without discipline, without restraint of any kind, and with no better instructors than my pride and my passions. When I was eighteen a man came into my life, and very soon he became the centre of my life. The power he exercised upon me went beyond attraction: it was fascination. I was warned against him, but I naturally put down all such warnings to jealousy or spite. Stranger still, my own instincts warned me against him, and yet I completely disregarded them. There is a kind of man who has that power over women; it is a magnetism which is physical rather than mental, against which the reason is powerless. So I found it, for although I knew that he was vain, shallow, and unscrupulous, yet at the glance of his eyes, at the touch of his hand, I became his willing slave.

"This went on for a long time. I had moments of recovered sanity when I almost hated him because he had broken down the defences of my pride; yet he had only to touch my hand, and I was like a dog shivering with delight at a casual caress. At last things came to a crisis. He persuaded me that

since my friends disliked him, it was hopeless to suppose they would consent to a marriage. The only way was for us to elope, and to be married secretly. Such a proposal should have at once revealed to me the baseness of the man's character. But I had now reached a condition when such a revelation had no weight for me. I had nothing to sustain me but my pride; that I had surrendered, and the weakest of all women is the woman whose only defence is her pride; it always fails her if the pressure of circumstance is great enough, and then she is helpless. You can foresee the sequel. I was very young, my mother was dead, my father had never sought my confidence; not a single human being had the least influence over me. I consented.

"The night came which he had fixed for our elopement. It was a very dark night, still and warm. We had company that night, and as I put my things together in my bedroom I could hear shouts of laughter below, the click of billiard balls, loud talk about a recent horse race. Every one was too much absorbed in the pleasure of the hour to have missed me. I went downstairs softly, stepped out upon the piazza, and in a moment the darkness had swallowed me up. I felt no compunction, and certainly no religious scruple. My foolish heart was too busy picturing the delights that awaited me, and the triumphant return in a few days, when

of course all would be forgiven, and my bold choice would be approved.

“It was a mile’s walk to the depot; it was there we were to meet. I went, with feet winged by desire, the blood singing in my veins for joy. And then—— I had just reached the depot. I stood almost at its door, when I saw distinctly some one standing there, waving an arm toward me, and a voice said, ‘Go back, my child, go back.’ It was no one I knew; I was sure of that. Nevertheless I was conscious of some tremendous authority in that tall figure with the outstretched arm and the commanding voice. I was seized with terror. I flew back to the house unseen and entered, and fell sobbing beside my bed. It was not until the summer dawn broke that I was able to think connectedly. When I did so I felt sure that I had been the subject of some miraculous interposition. A few days afterwards, the news came that this man, to whom I was about to confide my destiny on that awful night, was a married man, and a criminal. O, my God, what horror overcame me in that hour! But stronger even than horror was the sense of divine interposition. God Himself had stooped to rescue me that night. I was sure of it. He Who had said ‘Go back,’ was none other than the Son of God.

“It was then that life became empty—mere woven air. I was sick with shame. The thing men

called passion was altogether hateful to me. The world of pleasure in which I had lived seemed horrible. My sole thought was to find out who it was that spoke to me that night, and to be guided by him.

"The rest followed as I have told you. The revelation, for so I held it, of a real God who cared for me: of a Christ still in the world, like a Good Shepherd, shepherding His wandering sheep, changed all my life. Henceforth I knew that He alone had the right to claim my life. It had become His when He plucked it that night from the pit of shame into which I would have plunged it."

West had listened breathlessly to this confession. When it ceased he could only murmur a low "Thank you."

"I would not have told you this, but that you said I could help you," said Mercy.

"You have helped me," he replied. "You have made me see how right it is to think of Christ as you think; how like Christ it would be to act as you believe and know He did. For you, at least, this new manifestation of Christ of which the world is talking—the second coming as men call it—is not incredible."

"I don't need to be convinced of a second coming," she said, with a return to her old manner of tranquil gravity. "For me Christ *has* come. He has never been away."

XI

THE CONFESSION

WEST parted with Mercy Lane at the door of the tenement house, and took his way to the church.

His thoughts were quite clear now, and he realised that they were unalterable. He had passed a certain dividing line, a watershed; henceforth the stream of his life flowed toward the land of pure faith.

Hitherto he had been seeking some rational confirmation of the new ideas that had possessed him. He had really been trying to argue himself into faith. He saw how not only that his attempt was futile, but that it was absurd. A man's life must be governed either by pure reason or pure intuition; they could not be combined, for they were inherently incompatible. The one produced a Dr. Littleton; the other a Mercy Lane. They stood at opposite poles, and nothing could unite them.

Christianity itself was a sort of sublime irrationality. It centred itself in a God-man, utterly inconceivable to reason; on a series of astounding

acts, utterly irreconcilable with science; on the presence in human life of certain elements, which were in utter contradiction to the facts of life as sociology observed them. It did not appeal to the reason; it affronted it. Hence, as long as a man shut himself behind the barriers of reason Christianity was a thing invisible to him. He had to be born again into a new childhood before he could as much as see the Kingdom of God.

For his part, he knew that his choice was now made. He had left the company of the intellectuals; he had joined the company of the simple-hearted. That Christ should appear to a company of devout peasants at Canora; that the Stranger who had spoken to him in the darkened church should be really Christ Himself—these things were no longer unintelligible. On the contrary, they were just the things that might be expected to happen in a world permeated by the divine presence. The truly unintelligible thing was that people who affected to believe all the sublime irrationalities of Christianity should be constantly engaged in vain endeavours to reconcile them with reason; and that they should be astonished and sceptical when things happened which justified the claims of Christianity in spite of reason.

He realised also that he had now found the only true dynamic capable of transforming the Church.

It was useless to say "Would Jesus do this?" or "You must not do this because Jesus would not have done it" to people who never thought of Jesus as a living Presence. Had not Mrs. Lorimer at once mocked at this appeal? And he now saw why; it was at best but an appeal to sentiment, and in sentiment she was deficient. So were most people. The corroding force of worldliness, the hardening power of custom, soon rendered sentiment inoperative, even in deeper natures than Mrs. Lorimer's. The example of a dead and vanished Jesus had no more power to shape human conduct than the example of a dead and vanished parent; and did not every one know how rapidly death effaced the rules of life imposed by parents? Men respected the memory of the dead, but it was very rare to find men governed by the wishes of the dead, however well-beloved they were.

But if you could say to a Mrs. Lorimer, if you could say to the people of a church, "Jesus is here: He has never gone away: He commands your obedience"; and if you could make them realise the truth of what you said, then you had the dynamic of all reform. No one would dare to do in the presence of Christ things which he would allow himself to do under the shadow of the memory of Christ. It was simply because the Church had believed its Master gone upon a long journey, from which re-

turn was uncertain, that it had given itself over to greed and folly. When it knew that the Master stood before the door, would it not at once set its house in order?

This dynamic—the only dynamic of a true reform—West now possessed. And he was determined to apply it at once. He knew now in what words he would address his church. He had hitherto dreaded this hour; he was now eager for it.

As he drew near the church he was startled to find the street crowded. It was evident that the church was full, and that this crowd was composed of people unable to obtain admittance.

He should, of course, have been prepared for some such scene as this. But for days he had been so absorbed in the crisis of his own life that he had paid little attention to public events. He had not measured the effect upon the general mind of Stockmar's statements, and his own modesty had prevented him from understanding the position which he himself occupied in public attention. He had expected a large congregation, but this multitude took his breath away.

Even in the few moments while he watched the scene, the crowd grew rapidly. It became an immense concourse, and still the people came. And it was unlike any crowd that he had ever seen. It was so strangely silent, and as the white electric light

fell upon it, he saw a sea of faces, all touched with an air of waiting stillness, all pale, intense, expectant. "God help me," he thought, "what can I say to these?" But overmastering all his sense of shrinking was the triumphant sense that New York was actually awakening at last to the call of religious truth, and that he had a real message for the great perplexed city.

He turned to the side-door of the church, unlocked it, and entered his study.

Sturgess met him at the door.

"The church has been full for the last hour, sir," said the old man, in a trembling voice. "O, sir, I thank God that I have lived to see this day!"

In the room adjoining his study his deacons and managers were gathered. As he entered the room they rose, but for some moments no one said a word. They seemed to shrink from him. Between him and them some strange atmosphere interposed. They gazed upon him doubtfully.

At last one of them spoke, his senior deacon, an old man with a firm, hard mouth, eyes of steel, and a quick, nervous manner.

"We have been waiting for you," he said. "We should like to consult with you on this most unusual occasion."

"What is it you want to say?" he asked.

"We want to know what *you* intend to say," he replied. "There is a great deal of excitement among the people. In fact, this is a most critical occasion. We none of us approve this—this sensational situation. It will need careful handling, sir, very careful handling."

"Yes," interposed another deacon, "we're not accustomed to this sort of crowd. They're not our own people, you know. In fact, quite a number of them are quite low persons."

"I should have thought you would be glad to find the church so crowded in any case—with any kind of persons," he replied, with quiet irony.

"But they're not our own people, sir. And they are in a very excited state. There's been a door broken as they rushed in. And so we thought that the best way would be for you to just say a few quiet words to them, and let them go as soon as you can, before any mischief's done."

"Yes," said the senior deacon, "that's what we all think. It's a situation that demands careful handling, very careful handling."

"I don't think there will be any mischief done," West replied. "As for what I propose to say to the people, you must allow me to be the best judge of that."

"Of course, sir—in the ordinary way that's right enough," said the senior deacon. "But this is an

extraordinary occasion. And there are strange stories about, and we are afraid of what you may say. That's the plain truth. And so we concluded that we ought to advise with you before you spoke."

"I thank you for your thoughtfulness for me," said West. "I am sure it is kindly meant. But I repeat that I must be the sole judge of what I shall say to this congregation. No doubt I shall be divinely guided."

They were silent, but they gazed upon him more doubtfully than ever. West returned their glance with a long, wistful look. They were good men; he had worked with them in perfect harmony for years; but he could not disguise the knowledge that they were either already estranged from him, or on the brink of estrangement. While he was quivering with a spiritual ecstasy so keen that it consumed him, they were concerned with such trivial matters as a broken door; while he saw New York roused from lethargy and eager for religious truth, they were dismayed because a strange crowd had invaded the church, among whom were many "low persons."

But this was no time for argument. His hour had come. He turned from them with a silent prayer that they also might see the light he saw, passed through the door that led to the pulpit,

and in another moment stood before the vast congregation.

His first sensation was one of pure dismay. Not only were the seats all crowded, but the throng filled aisles and vestibules, and the little double gallery in the end of the church, never used in the memory of man, was also thronged. And there was none of that hum and stir of curiosity and expectation which was usual in a crowd of this dimension. That air of waiting stillness which he had observed in the multitude upon the street was much more marked here. It was like the tense electric stillness in a forest just before the thunder peals.

He signalled to the organist, and at the first chord of *Coronation* all the vast crowd moved, rose, and sang the familiar words, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." As the volume of sound rose triumphant, his confidence returned to him. He was sure now of himself, of his message. Upon that great surge of harmony he seemed to be upborne. It was as though he walked upon the sea, and heard amid the wash of waves the calm voice that said to him, "It is I, be not afraid."

From that instant he spoke and acted as a man who is the instrument or vehicle of some Power greater than himself. He opened the Bible, and read passage after passage in which Christ spoke of the certainty of His return to earth. He

concluded with the Parable of the Ten Virgins. "*Watch, therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh.*" The words seemed to traverse that tense atmosphere like a bolt of flame. There was a long, sighing response from the congregation. He lifted his hand for prayer. For some moments no words were given him. When at last he spoke, it was but a single sentence:

"Even so, come Lord Jesus, come."

And again from that great congregation rose that long, responsive sigh, like the murmur of innumerable leaves when the wind walks across a forest.

Then he began to speak. He alluded briefly to Stockmar's sudden illumination, to the Canora story, to the wave of religious feeling which had begun to overspread the world. Why were these things incredible? They were incredible only to those who had forgotten the sacred promise, "The Son of Man cometh." But Christ Himself had foreseen that His words would be forgotten. As it was in the days of Noah, so it would be through all the ages; men would eat and drink, and buy and sell, and marry and give in marriage, and leave unregarded and unread the signs that shone in the sky. Nay more, they would quote His words with reverence, and recite in universal creeds, "I

believe that He shall come to judge the quick and the dead," but without attaching to the words any positive or real meaning. He himself had done so. He spoke as one who had wilfully forgotten through many years the words of Christ, or had treated His solemn promises as the rhetoric of a wild idealism.

West spoke very slowly, in a low voice, broken by emotion, as he made this confession. Then he gathered himself together, as though shaking all the burden of past errors from his shoulders, and cried in a loud voice, "Nevertheless the hour was always fixed when He would come. Time and the world have waited for it. It was as certain as the conjunction of the stars, which traverse millions of miles of space quite unobserved, but reach their point at last. That point at which eternity once more breaks through upon the world is now reached. The long waiting of the universe is over—to us centuries, to God but a moment. The hour has struck. Christ has come."

He stood erect as he uttered these words, his face uplifted and illumined, his hand outstretched. This was no longer the Francis West known to the eclectic congregation of the Church of the Redemption; it was a new man who spoke, a prophet, the seer of a new day. As he spoke he felt as though a novel force arose in him, and streamed from him, in a flame of words. He trembled, but

it was not with fear; it was with the shock of that consuming rapture. And this streaming force that went forth from him enveloped the congregation in an instant. Sobs were heard, stifled cries arose. Many had unconsciously risen from their seats and stood gazing on him. Others were looking upward, with pale faces, as though they saw something in the dim roof of the church. He lifted his hand for silence, and again began to speak, in the same low tones he had at first employed.

"I am a great sinner," he said, "for it was given to me as a priest of religion to believe these things, and to teach them, but I did neither. I preferred to forget them, because it would have interfered with my mode of life had I remembered them. He who holds a thing as true, but lives as though it were untrue, soon finds the truth turned into lies to him. So all these solemn words of the Master, whom I professed to serve, became lies to me. It is a dreadful thing to say, but it is so. If I did not teach them, if I avoided those passages of Scripture in which they were distinctly stated, it was because they had become lies to me through my mode of life. If the Church does not believe them, it is for just the same cause; her mode of life contradicts them. For what kind of Church would that be in which these words were heartily believed? It would certainly be unlike any Church

that you or I could find in this City of New York to-night. It would spend its whole time in prayer, and good works; it would seek out the poor and the needy, remembering Who it was that said, 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, My brethren, ye do it unto Me.' It would not hoard wealth, but would dispense it; it would not spend its care and gold on costly temples for its own gratification, but in buying knowledge for the ignorant, comfort for the helpless, thus ransoming the soul of the people from destruction. Yes, it would do these things, because it could not help doing them. But the Church has not willed to do these things. It has clothed itself in purple raiment, and feasted sumptuously like Dives, because, like Dives, it has had no vision of that which lay behind the veil. And then, because men must needs justify their conduct to themselves in some way, however false, the Church has said, 'O, but Jesus never meant these strange words about His second coming. Therefore they are not binding on us, and we may safely disregard them.' So Dives thought, until that hour when the veil was rent in twain, and then he knew differently. He knew too late: God be thanked we know in time. For us the veil is slowly lifted, and He comes with gentle steps, that we may return to our first works before we are overwhelmed with the brightness of His appearing. He knocks

upon the door in warning. One and another has heard that knocking. O, listen, sinful people, and awake, before heaven and earth are shaken, and the door swings back which none can close again."

Once more there rose from the dense mass of thrilled, attentive people that long, responsive sigh. In the deep silence that ensued West found himself trying to read the thoughts that stirred in this multitude of minds. Was that sigh simply the expression of relief under an intolerable tension, the cry of the nerves, strained to breaking-point? Was it belief? Was it alarm? He could not tell; but he was instantly aware that in that crowd of faces, there were some that were passionless and cold, and that these were the faces of his own people. There was one exception—it was Payson Hume. The big florid man sat motionless, his colour gone, his eyes staring. That spectacle recalled West to his first resolve, to confess his faith rather than argue for it. He owed it to Payson Hume, he owed it to these men and women who had trusted him for years, to say exactly what had happened to himself. And yet how difficult the task! How much less difficult to make general statements of belief! and might not this be all that was required of him? Instantly he knew that it was not all. Stockmar had made his confession;

Mercy Lane had that day made hers; he must make his without reserve. This was his true cross; he must take it up. This inner debate was a matter of a few seconds—so swiftly may the soul choose the road of ultimate destinies.

He began to speak again, this time with a kind of breathless eagerness, as if anxious to be done. He narrated his emotions on that memorable Sunday, when the pictured Christ arrested his attention, and the stranger in the church put his searching questions to him.

“There may seem little in these incidents to you,” he said. “There must have seemed little in the incidents on the Damascus road to the companions of St. Paul. But they were not meant for them; they were meant for Paul alone. There was in him that which interpreted them, and therefore he had the vision which no one else could have. They were not the less real for that; they were so real that his entire future life was based on their reality, and he was able to convince a large portion of the world of that reality.

“Let me bear my witness, then. I am a vital sceptic, by which I mean a questioner, a doubter. I am not by temperament emotional, and it has always been my aim to discourage in myself and others the alertness of undisciplined emotions. But from the instant Rudolf Stockmar said that he

had seen Jesus on that Saturday afternoon, I found my scepticism crumbling. I had not even the wish to save it. It was as if some potent chemic element had touched it; it dissolved of itself.

"Stockmar's story was real to me. When the sad eyes of the Christ in the picture gazed into mine of the next afternoon, they also seemed real. That was the second stage in my illumination.

"Then came the third and last. I know now Who the Man was Who spoke to me in the church. Who else but He would have said, 'Francis West, if He came as I come, wouldst thou receive Him?' When He first addressed me I thought Him but an ordinary workingman. When He addressed Mary in the garden, she also thought He was the gardener. But for me, as for her, the Divine Soul shone through the earthly garb. I felt the throb of that Soul upon mine. Workingman as He appeared, yet to Him I bowed my head. And so I now make my confession. I have seen the Lord. Unworthy as I am, yet He has come to me, even me!"

He bowed his head upon the desk in uncontrollable emotion. The church was in confusion. The senior deacon, with a pallid face, came up the pulpit stair, whispered something to West, and took his arm as if to lead him away. But West shook his

head, rose to his feet, and once more faced the excited crowd.

And then a strange thing happened. In the little upper gallery at the end of the church a woman rose. He recognised her at once; she was the contralto singer in the church quartette. She had always been very different from the other members of the quartette; she alone sang with real feeling, because she alone had spiritual emotion; and she was without pride and simple as a child. She stood quiet for a moment, her hands clasped before her, and then began to sing. The pure deep voice, coming from that great height, fell upon the crowd like a veritable voice from heaven. By some exquisite instinct, as much spiritual as artistic, she selected an old hymn, set to one of those majestic tunes of an earlier age—“*Helmsley*.” Many must have heard it in childhood, some few perhaps knew its history—and for those who did there was a rapid vision of vast concourses of people ranged on London commons or Cornish hillsides, singing this very hymn to this very tune, as the voice of Whitefield or of Wesley ceased to thrill their hearts:

Lo, He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain,
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of His train.
Hallelujah,
God appears on earth to reign.

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Yea, Amen! let all adore Thee,
High on Thy eternal throne:
Saviour, take the power and glory,
Claim the kingdom for Thine own.
Hallelujah!
Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

Ah, the ecstasy of that repeated cry, Hallelujah! It was surely a challenge to belief, the cry of the trumpet to the faithful. After the first verse the melody was caught up by the entire congregation. They rose as by a common instinct. And as the last note ceased in the church, it was taken up by the crowd outside.

“Lo, He comes with clouds descending”—down the lighted streets swept the great multitude; they, and their song of faith. To many, hearing that strange song that night, it seemed as if the voice of Heaven itself had once more spoken to the ears of men.

XII

THE VOICE

ANOTHER day rose upon New York. Overhead was a sky of hard pure brilliance, that typical American sky, which knows black tempest and positive light, but is destitute of softness. In the tender skies of other lands, perpetually in motion with the passage of clouds, changeful, varied from hour to hour, even from moment to moment, skies that have shadows as well as light, and slow daybreaks, and long lingering twilights, some element of mystery exists which the dullest soul may feel at times. But there is no mystery in this typical American sky. Its purity and hardness are those of a precious stone. It is a dome of glass, glittering and vast; which does not call the soul away in dreams, but rather shuts down on human life with a material pressure—a fit sky for a race of men who find their chief pleasure in material things.

Another day rose upon New York, and that hard and brilliant sky seemed to mock the vague terrors of the ended night. Christ in New York—the very

thought was unintelligible. Beside the sleeping waters of a lake shut in by lonely hills, upon a mountain path that touched the clouds, on Galilee or Hermon, or in the olive-gardens of Mount Olivet—there He could be imagined, there the brooding eye might catch the faint gleam of His raiment as He passed—but here, among these streets of stone, in the shadow of these Babel towers, the thought seemed not possible. And so New York awoke, and the wheels of life revolved again with loud insolent insistence, and men forgot the awful dreams that had visited a thousand eyelids in the night. And yet not altogether.

Not altogether, for forces had been set in motion which could not be ignored. Payson Hume sat that morning in his office, unable to bend his mind to the business of the day. There were transfers of stock to be signed, checks to be endorsed, clients to be interviewed. The telephone rang, the click of the tape machine, recording the progress of the market, uttered its sharp solicitation, but he did not hear. He sat with hands folded before him, silent and distraught. Fortunes were being made and lost each moment; he remained indifferent. His face had lost its colour, his eye its keenness; it was evident that he and sleep were strangers. And over and over again his tired mind uttered one question, "What if it be true?"

Gold, gold, gold—that had been the one word that hitherto had spelt the whole meaning of his life. He had known poverty; he had known fierce struggles, and defeats that had seemed irretrievable; but always he had struggled up again, had fought on with a courage which in any other cause might be called heroic, and had pursued the golden phantom men called success with desperate endeavour. He had asked for no better kind of life. He had been wholly contented with it; nay, more, he had been enamoured of its very risks, invigorated to his inmost fibre by its difficulties. And now, in a single moment, all his thoughts had changed. His gold seemed but a handful of yellow dirt, his struggle to possess it, folly. Yet he did not mean to give it up. His intention was quite otherwise; it was to banish from his mind the causes of his discontent. And this he could not do. He fumbled blindly for the rudder of his life: the steering-gear was broken, and no longer answered to his will.

He swung round angrily to his desk, tried again to settle to his work, but after a few moments once more sat erect, staring into nothingness. "What if it be true?" The question seemed to flame upon the air. Well, if it were true, what did it imply? But he dared not gaze long into that abyss of thought. Yet he could not keep away from it. West said he had seen the Lord. There were other

people who said the same thing. Well, suppose that the Lord should come to him? He shivered at the thought. Yet if it were really true that Christ had come, there was no knowing to whom He might appear. At that very instant His foot might be upon the stairs. Of course, if he were sure of that, he would live a very different life. He would simply *have* to. He would certainly not like Christ to know some of those transactions by which his wealth had grown. Ah, but it was not true: it could not be. He reassured himself by calling West a fool, and himself a greater fool for being fooled by him. The jibe seemed successful. For at least five minutes he was able to read his correspondence. He rose, and consulted the tape about a stock in which he was deeply interested. But even while he did it, his hand trembled, he forgot his purpose, and stood staring at the wall, on which he saw distinctly the letters form themselves of the same alarming question, "What if it be true?"

Payson Hume was the type of multitudes of men and women in New York that day. There is no man more liable to sudden terror at the suggestion of the supernatural than the absolutely worldly man. The mere fact that he has shut out the mystic light from his life, wilfully and resolutely, makes that light all the more terrific when it does break through. He is wholly unprepared for it,

and he quails before it. People who, in a sense, have always had that light may learn to disregard it, as, alas! many Christians do. But men of Payson Hume's type, never having had it, are startled, shocked, and overwhelmed by it when it does appear. And perhaps this is the explanation of the strange fact that a man like Payson Hume, thoroughly worldly and of the world, was overwhelmed by the words West had spoken, while the senior deacon was incredulous.

He continued to open his mail; but he had not gone far before he stopped.

The letter which he was reading was from the widow of a minister named Jobson. Jobson he remembered as an anxious-looking man, the pastor of a small country church, who had by immense thrift saved two thousand dollars, which he had brought to him for investment. The investment had failed, and Jobson's distress had been so great that in a weak moment Hume had given him a written promise that he would undertake that the capital sum should not be lost. The promise was absolutely clear; it bound Hume and his heirs to repay the sum of two thousand dollars at some subsequent time which was not named. Hume regretted his promise as soon as it was made, but he could not cancel it. He knew perfectly well, however, that Jobson was not the sort of man to enforce

it by legal means. Ministers never did that, for the reputation of a minister was so delicate a matter that, whether he happened to be right or wrong, he always suffered by a legal contest over money. In course of time Hume forgot the whole thing. Then Jobson had died suddenly, and his widow, finding this letter among her husband's papers, had at once written Hume asking for the fulfilment of his promise.

Hume had replied that when he had made this promise, he expected to fulfil it, but that circumstances had greatly altered with himself. There had been a great stringency in the money market, and he himself was pressed for money. Painful as it was to him, he must therefore repudiate his promise.

This excuse was untrue. The only element of fact in it was that he had lost a considerable sum of money through an unexpected fall in stock, but it was not sufficient to produce more than temporary inconvenience. His method of life was unaltered. He still kept his automobile and his horses; his household expenditure was not reduced. But he took counsel with his greed rather than his honour, and persuaded himself quite readily that he was not bound to fulfil a claim so unusual. It would be a pretty thing if every man for whom he made investments were to demand his money back

in full when an investment failed. At that rate he would be a bankrupt in a year. Jobson ought to have been prepared to take his risk like other men. By dint of such arguments as these he soon came to believe that he was the injured party, not Jobson.

So he wrote his letter of repudiation, and this was the reply. It was a very temperate and sad letter which the widow had written. It was clear that she had no knowledge of business. She accepted his statement, and sympathised with him upon his losses. But, she added, his letter was a severe disappointment to her. The sum which her husband had so unfortunately invested was the savings of a lifetime. She was, therefore, left in great poverty, and did not know what she would do.

Hume read the letter, re-read it, and then sat gazing at it in silence. He expected recrimination and reproach; it contained neither. The letter was written upon common paper, in a delicate sloping handwriting, with some erasures and underlinings—a typical woman's letter. Its meaning, however, was quite clear; it released him from his promise. Well, that ended it. He had come off better than he had expected. The widow would no doubt shift somehow; it was extraordinary how such people always contrived to fall upon their feet. At all

events he had no further responsibility for her and her affairs.

But the thought was no sooner formed in his mind, than another thought intruded. What would Christ have to say on such a matter? What if the air of the office even now quivered with a Presence, and Christ stood before him!

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers!"

From some secret cabinet of memory the words flashed out upon him, keen as a glittering sword. He dropped the letter as though it had stung him. He looked round the room fearfully. Nothing in it was changed. The tape still clicked, as it unwound its messages of mammon; it spoke of a mechanical world, which fulfilled its course, undisturbed by foolish dreams. It seemed to say: "Money is the great end of man. You must make money. You are wasting time, and time is money." But clearer yet spoke another voice, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

"Payson Hume, give me that letter. I want to see it."

No audible voice had spoken, yet he was sure the words were uttered.

"Payson Hume, you have plenty, and more than

heart can wish. This poor widow has nothing. You fare sumptuously every day; the poor woman has breakfasted on bread moistened with her tears. You are strong and active; she is old and frail. She has children over whom her heart yearns. The loss of this money will be little to her, for she will soon be with Me in Paradise. But her boy will not be educated; he will know many years of hopeless drudgery before the merciful release of death comes. Her girl will spend her little strength in an unequal fight for bread. She will fight on till hope and strength are both exhausted; then she will sink into the mire of shame. Payson Hume, will you do these things—for they will be your doing,—and all for two thousand dollars? Will you sell your soul so cheap, the soul for which I died?"

He would like to have replied; he felt some answer was expected from him. But to whom should he reply? He could not address the vacant air. Ah, but was it vacant? He knew that it was not, and his blood stiffened at the thought.

The Voice spoke again; it was as if the air itself spoke.

"Payson Hume, for five-and-forty years you have lived in this world. You have seen much of human life: has nothing taught you pity?"

"I am not without pity," he cried, in a hoarse

voice. "People have even called me generous. At the most, I am no worse than my neighbours."

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who beat him, and left him by the wayside half dead," replied the Voice. "Two men, a priest and a Levite, passed by upon their several errands, and said, 'Poor fellow, he seems badly hurt, but after all it is no affair of ours'; and each, doubtless, thought himself pitiful. Another man came along the road, a poor man, and a heretic, whom both the Priest and Levite would have abhorred. This man did not content himself with saying, 'Poor fellow'; he lifted up the wounded man, dressed his wounds, and took him to a place of safety. That was pity. Payson Hume, would you have done that?"

He was silent.

"No," pursued the Voice, "you would not have done it. Had you been there, you would have searched the clothing of the wounded man to take what the thieves had left."

"I am not a thief!" he cried.

"Payson Hume," said the Voice, "how have you got your money? I will tell you, for I know all about it. How often have you bought something which you knew was worth a large sum for a little sum, because he from whom you bought it was poor and in distress? How often have you taken

advantage of the guileless, and those who had no worldly wisdom? O, you have not robbed them in the daylight, and left them half dead, as did those Jericho robbers; for such acts there is punishment, and you dared not do them. But you have intrigued, lied, and deceived to get your gold. You have held nothing sacred when your greed clamoured for its gratification, neither truth nor honour, neither justice nor compassion. The thief who steals because he is hungry goes to prison; but there is another kind of thief who steals for greed, and he is not punished. Nevertheless, he is the worst of thieves. Payson Hume, I tell you that those Jericho robbers who stole for need were honest men compared with you, who steal for greed."

"I have done no more, no worse than a thousand other men have done!" he cried.

"Though a thousand do evil, yet that is no excuse for you. What have these other men to do with you? When the name of Payson Hume is called on the Judgment Day, will those other men you speak of take your place? Will they bear the burden of your acts? Will they suffer for you, and be punished in your stead? No, they cannot, even if they would. Every man must bear his own burden."

Once more he was silent. He had passed beyond wonder. Unnatural as it seemed, yet he knew

the Voice was real. And he knew also that it spoke with an authority which he dared not contest. Yet there was one question which he ached to ask. His voice sank into a whisper, and at last he asked it:

“Who is it who is speaking to me?”

“I am One who has known you all your days; known you so thoroughly that no minutest act has been hidden from My eyes. I saw you when you were laid within your mother’s arms, a helpless, wailing babe. I was near you in your childhood and your boyhood, and there were moments when your face was turned towards Mine. But as the years came, more and more you turned away from Me. You grew hard, selfish, covetous of gain. You had a partner in your business who put implicit faith in you; you robbed him without mercy, and at last thrust him out, when you could rob him no more. He is an old man now, waiting for death in the city poorhouse; but he is happier than you. You had friends, or those who passed for friends; but not one of them ever loved you; they used you for their advantage, as you used them, and were you begging bread to-morrow, not one of them would help you. You have won the thing you sought, no doubt; you have gold; but you have paid for it with your own soul. Was it worth the price? Is it not a better thing to live with poverty in stainless honour, to have friends who love you

for yourself, to possess a heart that is pure and gentle, in which happiness can dwell, than to be what you are, a man whose heart is eaten out with greed, of whom nothing more than this is known that he has lived to win money, and has won it?"

"Yes, I admit I did wrong in that matter of the partnership. But it was long ago."

"Payson Hume," the Voice replied, with sternness, "have you lived all these years and never known that there is a present and a future in men's sinnings, but no past? All human acts are things with roots; they propagate themselves, and bear their fruit, whether good or evil, as long as life lasts—and longer. Men suffer to-day for evils wrought centuries before their birth; and the evils they themselves commit will outlast them by centuries. Is not that true?"

"Yes, it is true," he groaned. "I have never thought of it like that, but I see that it is true."

"And yet you would add fresh sins to the catalogue—you would sow fresh seeds of evil. Payson Hume, I have known your past; I also foresee your future. You have lived for five-and-forty years, and since you passed out of the innocence of boyhood, each year has witnessed your deterioration. You have but a few more years to live; you yourself must needs know that. I see the shadows gathering in your path—I see you treading it, more

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and more alone, a man friendless and unhonoured, with no living bonds that bind him to his kind. And in those shadows all your sins will lie in wait for you. That old man dying in the poorhouse will be there, and how many others whom you have robbed and beggared, each with the long records of his tears, demanding tear for tear, agony for agony from you."

· He sprang to his feet in overmastering terror.

"No, no!" he cried—"not that, Lord. Is there no other way?"

And then he fell upon his knees.

There was a long silence, more terrible than any speech. It fell upon him with an awful pressure, till the very sinews of his strength dissolved beneath its weight. His one prayer now was that the Voice would speak again, his one dread that It would not.

At last It spoke, and no longer sternly. There was a gentleness in It that fell like a soft hand upon his tortured heart.

"There is another way," It said, "for such is the boundless grace of God that no man need continue in his sins who is willing to forsake them.

"God gives you one more chance; it is the last. Take the letter which lies now upon your desk, and answer it. Tell the widow, whom you would have robbed, that you will restore fourfold the

money that is hers. Put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow. Do this, and it shall be that when the shadows fall they shall not be without light; friendly hands shall meet you there, welcoming lips shall speak your name, and the blessing of the poor shall build the monument upon your grave, and be your memorial among men."

The Voice ceased, but the silence was no more a pressure on his heart; it was an embrace. He felt a sense of living warmth, a sudden glow of hope and resolution.

"Master, Master," he whispered, "hast Thou indeed spoken to such an one as I?"

He rose from his knees, his face convulsed with tears, but all kindled and radiant, too, with a new and lovely light.

His first act was to write to Mrs. Jobson. He told her bluntly that he had meant to rob her; he asked her forgiveness, and he enclosed a draft for four times the money he had promised her. He had just signed his letter when there was a knock upon the door, and Mercy Lane entered. It was part of her business to collect subscriptions for her work; it was a task she hated.

"Ah, Miss Lane," he said, with a welcoming

smile, "you have come at a happy moment. Tell me about your work."

She gave him such details as were freshest in her memory.

"And what is my subscription?"

She told him. He paid each month twice as much for his cigars.

"Ah, it seems rather small, doesn't it?" he said.

"I've had that thought at times myself," she answered, with a whimsical glance.

"Well, let us change it," he said. "Let us make it fourfold. Fourfold, you understand."

She listened with astonishment. She had long ago summed up Payson Hume as a hard man, who gave grudgingly; she had usually to make three or four visits to him before he gave her his exceedingly modest contribution.

"And let me see," he continued; "you must be always needing money in a work like yours for private charity. Cases of particular distress, you know. I should like to share with you in that kind of giving. Draw on me for five thousand dollars, and when you want more, come again."

A clerk entered anxiously.

"What is it?" Hume asked.

The clerk looked significantly at Mercy Lane.

"O, you may speak," Hume said.

"Well, sir, there's a great flurry in the market

in Canadian Pacific. Rogers has sent over an urgent message that you must act at once. There is a big profit to be taken on rapid selling. What are your instructions, sir?"

"Instructions?" he said, with a grave smile. "Why, let me see. Tell Rogers I've closed up business for to-day."

"But he says this can't stand over, sir."

"O, he says that, does he? Well then, tell him I've made as much money as I want. I don't need more. In fact, I've found a new investment, from which I expect returns so great that I intend to put all my capital into it."

"He is greatly annoyed, sir. His message was most urgent. Shall I tell him what your new investment is?"

"Certainly, I have no wish to keep it to myself. Tell him that I am about to invest all my money in the stock of Human Kindness."

"Never heard of that stock," said the clerk, in bewilderment.

"Didn't you?" said Hume. "Well, this lady can tell you all about it. She's one of the Directors in the Company. And now, Miss Lane, if you will do me the honour, I shall be glad if you will let me walk with you to the scene of your labours. To examine, for myself, you know, the kind of investment I am making. It has always been my

rule never to make investments without the closest personal investigation."

"It is my belief," said the clerk, an hour later, as he sat at lunch with some fellow-clerks, "that our old man's gone crazy. They've got all kinds of queer names for mines—there's Happy Day, and Old Hundred, and lots of others,—but I never heard of one called Human Kindness; did you?"

"Depend upon it, we shall hear of it soon enough, if Hume's in it," said another clerk.

"Perhaps so, but it has a precious queer sound to me," said Hume's clerk. "You mark what I say, there's something or somebody has got a hold on Payson Hume. Saw him go off with a kind of nurse before noon when the market was calling to him. Didn't care a continental about what Rogers had to say. If that does not look like craziness, I'd like to know what does?"

The clerk was quite wrong in his conclusion, but one of his statements was much truer than he knew.

There was no doubt that Something or Somebody had got a hold on Payson Hume.

XIII

HELEN'S CASE

PERHAPS, when life reaches its last chapters, the happiest hours will appear those which have been most fully touched with the spirit of enthusiasm. For the enthusiast, life is a series of breathless surprises, adventures, romances; for the religious enthusiast, life is the romance of the infinite. Even though every goal prove illusory, every dream untrue, yet the fire and passion kindled in the quest will remain, and will dower age itself with the spirit of undying youth. But God help those whose coldly calculated years move to a calculated close, without any memory of heart-beats quickened by a wise folly, by the sting of impulses thirsting for the unattainable; for to such each succeeding year is but a rehearsal of the hour of burial.

Helen West, as she sat in her room in her mother's home at Bedminster, was experiencing what these things meant, without being conscious of their causes.

It was Sunday morning; she had just returned

from the Unitarian Church. The prim, dreary street of the little New England town lay beneath her window; prim old-fashioned people moved along it in little groups; prim lawns lay under the ancient trees; a sedate, serenely dull town, with something meagre and narrow in its very atmosphere. The service in which she had participated had had the same note of meagreness. The very hymns had been pared down in sentiment by the hand of theological frugality. The sermon had been destitute of imagination as a proposition in Euclid. And then the complacency of the whole performance; the almost insolent note of sufficiency; the assumption that wisdom died with Emerson, and that outside this feebly irradiated spot of New England the whole world lay in gross darkness! She smiled a little bitterly at the thought. She remembered also that it was a thought that had never visited her before. But then she had never before brought a wounded heart with her to Bedminster. It is strange how differently the world appears to the wounded and the unwounded heart.

Once more she went wearily over the present conditions of her life: she had done little else since her arrival in Bedminster. How long was this estrangement from her husband to last? How long was she to act a part, concealing her anguish as she best could under a studied vivacity? For

hitherto she had made no confession to her mother or her friends. She had allowed them to assume that she had come home merely for rest from the too ardent toils of the city. Did they know better? The very suspicion humbled her with shame. Sometimes she thought she read caustic interrogation in their glances; she had become so sensitive that she detected pity in a hand's shake. At other times she comforted herself that Bedminster was so remote a backwater in the great stream of life that an earthquake in New York would be a month old before Bedminster began to talk of it. But her better sense told her that, sooner or later, the truth must be known. And when it was known, where should she hide her head? And with that reflection her pride stiffened her with hoops of steel.

Well, there was nothing to be done—only to endure. Women had been mistaken in their husbands before; she was not the only one. But surely no one had ever made a mistake so incalculable as hers; it would have been a thing easier to bear had her husband been from the first a fool, whom she had sedulously tried to guard and save; she could then at least have pleaded her own heroism. But to marry a man who seemed wise, to boast of his wisdom as she had done a hundred times, and then to have to acknowledge him a fool—that was a wrong and a humiliation beyond remedy. It was

she who stood self-accused of misjudgment, she who had always moved before these friends of her youth as a small Hypatia of wisdom! There lay the real secret of her misery—hurt self-esteem.

As her languid eye watched the road, she saw a figure approaching whom she thought she knew: a moment later she recognised Dr. Littleton. Her spirits rose with a sudden bound. No doubt he was coming as an ambassador from her husband. She ran downstairs and stood eagerly at the door to welcome him.

"Well, Doctor?" she said brightly, holding out both hands to him.

"Yes, it is I," he answered. "I have been preaching at Stowe, and thought I would come over to dine with you, if you'll have me."

Then he did not come from her husband; her countenance fell. He was quick to mark the change.

"I was in New York yesterday," he said. "You and I must have a little talk presently."

She understood and, in spite of her pride, her heart gave a wild throb.

At this moment dinner was served, and there was no further opportunity of conversation. Helen's mother, Mrs. Parke, came forward to welcome her guest. She was a woman fast passing into old age, with a delusive fragility of appearance. Her figure was upright and attenuated, her face delicately

wrinkled; soft white hair, in two thin rippled waves, lay over a high, narrow forehead; the eyes were of a dimmed blue, still keen and shrewd, however, and the mouth was firm. She had passed all her life in Bedminster, and was much respected as the last member of one of the oldest families in the little town. She had arrived at fixity of opinion on most subjects quite early in life, and the circumstances of her life had not been favourable to change. She was a woman without regrets, without illusions; she had felt no need of a larger world than that in which her lot was cast; she was content to move in an ascertained orbit, narrow but sufficient, with no sense of larger heavens around her. She was, in fact, an excellent example of the cultivated provincialism of New England.

Dr. Littleton greeted her with the ease of old friendship, but as the meal proceeded conversation languished. How much did the mother know of the daughter's circumstances? He scanned the two faces before him shrewdly, but they revealed nothing. And yet something was revealed, for they had much in common. It seemed to Dr. Littleton that he had never noticed the likeness before, or at least, not so markedly, and this disturbed him. Helen's life had been very different from her mother's; it had had a breadth of interest and activity which her mother's had not known; but what if

Helen's character still retained the hard narrowness of this New England provincialism which distinguished her mother?

And by a sudden swift intuition he surmised that this was really so. The larger life of Helen had but put a polish on granite; the impenetrable strata remained. And his heart fell at the thought.

He was roused from his uneasy reverie by the direct question of Mrs. Parke. "And now, Doctor, tell me how Francis is going on, for Helen has told me nothing."

It was the question which he had feared. He looked apprehensively at Helen. She immediately took up the challenge.

"You are quite free to speak, Doctor," she said. "Indeed, I wish you would."

"Why, what is the matter? I hope you have nothing very surprising to communicate," said Mrs. Parke.

"Well, yes, it is surprising. But I suppose you ought to know, and since Helen has said nothing, I must."

And thereupon he gave a plain uncoloured statement of his recent interview with West. He was careful to suppress his own opinions. He owned himself perplexed. He laid great stress upon West's evident sincerity, his loneliness, his need of love and friendship. His own affection for West

warmed with his advocacy of him. But as he proceeded, the face of Mrs. Parke became pale and rigid. At last she interrupted him.

"Do I understand that Francis and Helen have separated?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"Helen can best tell you that," he replied.

Helen had been sitting during all the time that Littleton had spoken, with her face hidden in her hands. She now lifted a miserable face to her mother, and said in a whisper, "Yes."

"Did he consent to it?"

"No."

"Then you left him?"

"Yes."

"And you came home to me, and did not tell me a word."

"Mother, I could not tell you."

"Why not?"

"You would not have understood."

"I understand better than you think," she retorted. "I understand that you have been disloyal to both him and me, and that you have disgraced us both."

The words were so surprising that neither Littleton nor Helen spoke for some moments. Up to this point Helen had never doubted that her mother would approve her action, and Littleton had held the same view.

"Mother," Helen said, at last, "you cannot mean what you say. Or, if you do, you only prove your entire incapacity to understand."

"O, I know you have a poor opinion of my discernment," she replied. "Nevertheless, I am twice your age, and there are some things I see quite clearly which you do not see at all. And the chief thing I see is this: that a wife's place is beside her husband, as long as he loves her, whatever he may do or think. You took him for better or for worse, and you have no right to leave him because things turn out against your wishes."

"But, mother," said Helen, stung at last into anger, "it is not a case of things turning out against my wishes. It is a case of what he thinks truth, and what I think."

"A case not of truth, but of pride, as I read it, of perverse foolish pride on your part. And not only foolish, but cruel pride, for you have never given a thought to the disgrace you put upon both him and me."

"Ah, I see, you are all for convention, mother, and you don't care for the question of truth at all. And for me convention is nothing and truth everything."

"And if I understand what Dr. Littleton has said, that is exactly what Francis says about himself; and what right, therefore, have you to blame

him? But I don't mind admitting that your outcry about truth doesn't interest me at all."

"That again, mother, is a thing you don't mean."

"I mean every word of it," she replied, "and for this reason: I've lived long enough to see all kinds of so-called truths explode like rockets, and leave the world no brighter. Francis may be right or wrong in his opinions—I am not going to trouble myself to decide. But what you call convention continues long after all the rockets have exploded. Convention simply means doing your duty in the ordinary human way, whatever happens. I don't know whether Christ is coming or has come, or anything about it, and I don't care to know. But I'm quite sure of this, that if He should come He'll expect to find you living with your husband, and putting up with his faults, and giving him your affection, and keeping your vows to him; and He'll think the better of you if you do these things, and the worse of you if you don't. He'll have common-sense enough for that, be sure of it."

Helen could not forbear a wan smile at this thrust. As for Littleton, he laughed outright. And the laugh relieved the tension.

"You speak like a pagan, mother," said Helen.

"Or a sound New Englander," retorted Littleton. "And I'm much of your mother's opinion, my dear."

"And you both laugh at me," she said, with a trembling lip. "You both make light of that which I value most, my intellectual integrity."

"My dear child," said Littleton, "there really isn't such a thing, in your sense of the word. The finest mind in the world is a composite of truth and error. And to live together at all we have to compromise on other people's errors because we have so many of our own."

"That's right," said her mother, "you reason with her. I'm only a pagan, you know—and I must admit a very tired pagan just now. I'm going to lie down and think things over quietly."

And she left the room, with a glance of half-humourous scorn, perfectly at poise, perfectly assured that all her daughter's trouble was but a storm in a teacup. Verily there are great advantages in provincialism.

But in this she erred, as Dr. Littleton well knew. It was no storm in a teacup with which he had to deal. It was a very grave question of two human destinies, complicated not only by matters of faith, but by much deeper problems of temperament.

"I'm afraid I'm a very poor kind of ambassador," he remarked, in a grave and gentle voice, "and I've already damaged my case, haven't I?"

"You laughed at me," Helen answered.

"No, not at you—God forbid, my child. I

laughed at your mother's way of putting things, that is all. But, do you know, I really agree with your mother."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," she answered, in a dreary voice.

"Yes, my dear, there's a great deal more to be said, and you must let me try to say it. I don't agree with Francis—you know that, and he knows it, too. But after I left him I began to think over the whole scene, and I saw that, however mistaken he might be, he was doing a really heroic thing."

"I cannot call gratuitous folly heroic," she interrupted.

"Most of the heroism of the world has appeared gratuitous folly to the immediate onlookers," he replied; "so we will not dispute over terms. Now suppose I put it to you like this. Suppose you and Francis lived in Russia, honoured and esteemed by all sorts of pleasant people, and Francis had suddenly become involved in the maelstrom of the revolutionary movement. He comes to you some night and tells you that he can no longer live the pleasant life you have both loved; that he has had a vision of justice, which demands from him the supreme sacrifice; that he must leave all, and follow that vision, even though it leads him to the prison or the scaffold. And suppose you did not agree with him in any one of his conclusions; would

you still claim your right to go on living the old pleasant life at the expense of his spirit? Would you bid him kill his soul, by crushing out all these noble instincts of justice which had vitalised it, simply because you did not share them?"

"I have never proposed such a thing to Francis," she replied.

"Not in so many words, my dear, but tacitly, when you left him because your views were not his views. The night you left him, you asked him to kill his soul for your sake."

She was silent.

"But let me finish my parable," he continued. "Here is Francis telling you of a supreme sacrifice which he must make. Wouldn't you, even though you could comprehend neither his aims nor his reasons, at least recognise his heroism? And wouldn't his heroism call forth heroism in you—make you ready to say: 'I think you wrong, but I do dimly see something noble, something splendidly heroic in what you mean to do. Therefore, I elect to go with you, though it is by a way I know not. If you can die for a vision, I can die for you.' Wouldn't you have said that, my child?"

"No, I could not—I would not."

"Multitudes of women have, my child."

"Multitudes of ignorant women, perhaps."

"No; multitudes of good women. Their igno-

rance or wisdom had no influence on their action. They simply rose into heroism because they were good, because they loved; and their heroism was all the more wonderful because it did not rest on reason."

"Then I am neither good nor heroic," she replied bitterly. "I must be content to be merely honest."

She rose from her seat, and stood facing Dr. Littleton. Her face was pale; her hands were clasped behind her back; the slight figure was tense and straight. The glow of the setting sun shone round her, edging her with rose-flame.

"It is no good, Dr. Littleton. I am not such a woman as you describe. I cannot be. I cannot act with wilful unreason. You make me wish that I could. But we all of us have limits set by our own natures, limits that we cannot overpass, or overpass at our peril. If I acted as you suggest I should lose my own self-respect, and without that I think I could not live at all. You say there is no such thing as intellectual integrity. Perhaps not in the sense you mean. But there's another sense in which it exists clearly enough. It means for me following the truth so far as I know it, and not one step further; allowing no bribe, no seduction, to deflect me from the path of truth as I see it; and it seems to me that there is nothing so much worth living for as that. I know, at all events, that I could

not consent to live on any other terms. You speak as if my love for Francis was not strong enough to endure sacrifice for his sake. Don't you see that it is just because my love is so strong that I cannot bear the spectacle of what seems to me folly in him; that I am sacrificing myself, really and truly, when I accept a desolate life for myself, rather than allow his image to be slowly ruined in my eyes, by the daily spectacle of things in him which might turn my love to scorn? No, I prefer to keep his image radiant in my heart, and this I can only do by living in the memory of what has been, by avoiding the spectacle of what is."

She paused, as if some more difficult word waited to be uttered. It did not come. The deepest thing is always the unsaid thing. Yet the word might be guessed; it shone in her eyes, it pulsed in her trembling breast, it fluttered on her wan pitiful lips—"I love him—I shall always love him."

Dr. Littleton turned his head away, and it seemed as though a whole sea of silence rushed in between them. "Poor mortal, clinging to thy tiny bit of anchorage in the infinite, who shall help thee?" was his thought.

When she spoke again she had recovered her habitual calm.

"There is one thing I will promise you," she said. "I will try to understand. And if I can

bring myself to think as Francis thinks, I will go back to him upon the instant. That is the most that I can say. You may tell him that."

She left the room, with a backward glance at the old Doctor.

"Alas! I have done no good," the Doctor murmured.

He rose wearily, and gazed out into the sunset glow. A word of hers came back to him with singular force—she had said that her mother spoke like a pagan, because her mother had avowed her lack of interest in speculative truth. And he asked himself whether, after all, her mother's attitude was not the only sane and sensible attitude? The pagan at least had the wisdom to leave religious mysteries to the priest, to be content with a simple rule of conduct for himself, and to let the philosopher define conduct. And the result had been a certain child-like liberty of life, a power of joy in the common day, which reflected itself in all Greek literature. Was it not better so? And then had come the Nazarene, casting the shadow of His Cross across all the world, forcing upon common men and women the great problems of religion which not one mind in a million was fitted to grasp or comprehend, and the result had been age-long strife, variance, and misunderstanding. What had he himself gained by a lifetime devoted to the study

of religion? He had spent laborious days in the pursuit of phantoms of the mind, and had come to old age without the leisure to enjoy life for itself, and at last without the inclination. A plain convention of social honesty, kindness, and good faith—that was all that most people needed, all that any man ought to ask, and the less a man troubled himself about truth the happier would he be. And it seemed to him that the story of Francis and Helen was a brief epitome of the story of the ages; men and women forever perplexing themselves over problems which the ordinary human mind was unable to comprehend, upon which complete harmony of interpretation was always impossible, while life itself, with all its available happiness, ran past their feet like a forgotten stream of joy, at which they never stooped to drink. What madness to be forever bartering the attainable for the unattainable, the certain for the uncertain! Ah, it was a terrible moment for the world when Christ entered it, and all that He had done for men was dearly purchased at the price of that Sword of Strife which He Himself had said was His sign and His bequest.

And yet, even while he pursued these daring and unusual thoughts, the old man knew that if another had suggested them, he would have vehemently repudiated them. He knew that no power could recover the pagan attitude toward life; that every

man who had tried to do so had failed: that it was departed forever as completely as the sunset colour, which was even now fading from the western sky. The Nazarene had once and for all settled the trend of life. It was impossible to consider life at all, at any point, for a single moment, without collision with Him. He was inevitable as the atmosphere itself. And because this was so, he perceived that the strange conduct of Francis West might, after all, have a basis in fact. At all events he could not any longer label it a wild delusion. Like Helen, he also must try to understand. For him, as for her, it was the one hope of final peace.

The door opened, and Mrs. Parke entered.

"Well, Doctor," she said cheerfully, "have you succeeded in bringing Helen to reason?"

"I don't know about reason," he said, "but I think she has reached a point where she is willing to learn."

"Learn what, pray?"

"Learn to accept truth in whatever strange guise it may come."

"Does that mean that she is going back to Francis?"

"Not yet. And if you will be advised by me you won't press her to do so. You and I can do nothing to help her, much to hinder her. If she goes back, it will be by her own way."

"Well, I'm sure I don't wish to be harsh with her, though I think her conduct ridiculous. Of course she can stay here as long as she pleases, though I hope for everybody's sake it won't be long."

"It won't be long, I think."

A sudden apprehension quickened in the dimmed blue eyes.

"Why do you speak in that tone?" she said.

"Because the poor child is worn out. Her pride is breaking her heart. And she is not one who recovers from that kind of wound rapidly."

"You don't think she's ill, do you?"

"Not ill, only heart-sick. But if her heart is not healed soon, I should fear for her body. She is the kind of woman who thinks she can live without love, and she isn't. For that matter, I never knew the woman who could."

XIV

THE CARDINAL'S APPEAL

NEW YORK, in spite of all its imperturbable vivacity, its brilliant worldliness, was touched at last. There could be no doubt of it. The shadow of Eternity had fallen over the great city.

In many parts of the city business was almost suspended. In Wall Street itself a strange silence reigned. It was in vain that the great kings of finance endeavoured to stimulate the stagnant market—prices still sank, and the most wonderful thing was that no one seemed to care. One glimpse of Eternity had made everything else seem trivial. For who could be eager to lay up treasure upon earth when perhaps the very days of the earth itself were numbered?

And at last the Church had spoken; this was the sensation of the hour.

A few days after the great service in West's church a general meeting of all the ministers of religion in New York had been called. At this

meeting both Dr. Field and Stockmar were invited to make a statement.

No more impressive gathering had ever been seen in the great city. It included the representatives of all the forms of the Christian faith. Most notable of all its members was the Roman Cardinal. Born of lowly people, Cardinal Livingstone had by sheer genius, scholarship, and practical ability, risen while yet a comparatively young man to the highest position which the Church had to offer him. He had become a Prince of the Roman Church without losing his humility, and was noted far and wide for his incessant activity in the social service of the people. Without being in any sense an obscurantist, he had nevertheless been the firm opponent of the new liberal movement which went by the name of Modernism. Yet he had enough illumination to perceive that Modernism was a sincere effort to free religion from much that was stultifying in tradition. But he also perceived that to ordinary men Modernism was a grave peril, because the ordinary mind was not trained to comprehend its issues, and was unable to discriminate between what was true and false in its teachings. Had he been called upon to define his real position, he would probably have said that it was the duty of private intellect to disclaim its own right of liberty for the public good; that it was not enough to prove a conclusion true, it must

also be proved useful to the mass of men, before it was given to the world; that all truth was to be judged at the tribunal of public exigency.

There had been a period in his own life, of which only a very few intimate friends were aware, when he had been sorely tempted to revolt against traditionalism. What had saved him? Simply his incessant contact with people of inferior intellect. He had found relief from his own mental unrest in incessant toils for the social good of the common people. And the more heavily the social problems of the day pressed upon his heart, the less important appeared any private conclusions which he might hold on questions of theology. His war was against greed, dirt, ignorance, and sin; to secure justice for the poor was the supreme aim of his life; and the more he learned of the poor the more sympathetic he became to the limits of their intelligence. What good could he do by unsettling their simple thoughts about religion? He might impart truth, but it would be at the expense of their religious instincts. He preferred therefore to nourish their dim instincts of piety, even though it involved a tacit assent to their superstitions. Thus it had happened that, as he grew older, he had more and more returned to his first faith, and his doubts about doctrine had been dissolved in the flame of his ardent spirit of social service.

In person he was tall and spare. He was ascetic by temperament, as well as by the conditions of his life, which made any form of self-indulgence impossible. It was commonly reported that his working day was rarely less than sixteen hours; it was certainly true that he rarely slept for more than five hours, that his food was of the simplest, and that he was capable of a prolonged activity which was the astonishment of his friends and the despair of his secretaries. His face would have attracted attention anywhere. It was long and thin, yet with a perfect beauty of line; the forehead was high, narrow, and deeply lined; the mouth sweet and firm, the eyes deep-set and of a peculiar depth of colour, which might be best described as blue-black. Such was the man who now entered the hall where the ministers of New York were assembled, a man whose natural primacy not even the most robust Protestant among them would have thought of disputing.

There was a buzz of interest, succeeded by a deep silence, as the Cardinal took his place on the small dais at the end of the hall. He rose at once, and began to speak in a clear, low voice.

His address was brief, but it admirably summed up the situation. He began by saying that the presence in that hall of representatives of all forms of the Christian faith was in itself an evidence of

the supreme emergency which had arisen. So far as his own communion went, the hope and belief of the second coming of the Master had never been ignored. There were many authentic instances in the lives of the saints of the appearance of Christ to individuals, and although all might not admit the evidence, yet to him it was incontrovertible. But whether they admitted it or not, no student of the history of the Church universal could doubt that the hope of the Master's coming was an essential feature of the Christian religion. It would now appear, from such knowledge as they possessed, that there had been certain manifestations of the Master vouchsafed to certain persons in their own midst. Their first duty was to receive the statements of these individuals with an open mind. It was their duty, as the representatives of religion, to take some action which should allay or direct the agitation of the public mind. For there could be no doubt that the public mind was agitated in an unprecedented degree, and not in New York alone, but throughout the entire world. The Church had too long been silent upon this grave matter, and the silence had been misinterpreted. This silence could no longer be maintained, and for his part, he was ready to say, as he had no doubt all present would say, that he was willing to be guided in his judgment by a spirit of humility.

"Let us lay aside all personal prejudices," he concluded, "as we here, for the time, lay aside all differences of administration. The world hangs upon the precipice of a great delusion, or it stands upon the threshold of a vast discovery. Let us ask guidance of God that we may discern truth from error."

He bowed his head, and the whole assembly followed his example. And then, in that intense silence, there rose the thin, quavering voice of the oldest Protestant bishop in New York. Guided by some exquisite instinct he used a form of prayer which bound together the long separated Roman and Protestant communions—words dear to each, words historically the possession of each, words which drew the ages themselves together in a common faith; first, the great prayer of St. Chrysostom that God would grant them in this world the knowledge of His truth, and in the world to come eternal life; and then the immortal prayer uttered over a million graves: "Thou knowest, O Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not Thy merciful ears to our prayer, but spare us, O Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, Thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from Thee."

And it seemed as though the grave itself were vanquished in that prayer—the grave and death;

so that death became unthinkable, life an inextinguishable reality; and the Presence who broke down the doors of death and the grave, ineffably real. It was as though the dim ghosts of a thousand generations were leagued in and round the silent hall; the air was winnowed with the beat of unseen wings, the soft tread of multitudinous feet: and all the long agony of the human race in its revolt against death, all the sighs and prayers and onward-looking thoughts of the centuries found a voice, protesting, poignant, infinitely pathetic.

The prayer ended, and the assemblage settled to the business of the hour. First of all Stockmar spoke, giving his plain statement in much the same form which he had already used in his conversations with Field. Field followed, with an assertion of his faith in Stockmar's narrative.

"I seek to prove nothing," he said; "I offer no argument. I am prepared only to make two statements, for which I can offer only the guarantee of my own integrity and experience. The first is that there is nothing in science, so far as I understand it, to render the narrative of Rudolf Stockmar incredible. The second is that I pledge any reputation which I may possess for the complete sanity of Stockmar. Long ago a great apostle, standing in the presence of a pagan ruler, asked 'Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should

raise the dead?' A similar question may be asked this morning, but with a deeper emphasis, born out of centuries of faith, 'Why should it be thought a thing incredible that One already raised from the dead should make Himself known to the living?' My answer, not as a Christian apologist, to which character I have little claim, but merely as a man of science, engaged in the investigation of truth, is that I know no reason for the rejection of Stockmar's story, except such as may be found in the obstinate prejudice of the human mind. I therefore endorse the Cardinal's appeal for an open mind, and for that spirit of humility which is the first condition of any successful quest of truth. We who are engaged in scientific research know well that we must be prepared for constant contradictions of our own most settled theories; Nature surrenders her secrets only to the humble. We are guided by one law alone: to examine all things, to reject nothing, to be surprised at nothing, to be guided by nothing but the weight of evidence. I submit that this is the spirit which should animate each one of us this morning. In patience and humility alone can we hope to find the path of wisdom."

This speech produced, as might have been expected, a profound impression. The reputation of the great surgeon was known to all, and there is always a tendency among ministers to listen with un-

usual deference to the man of science when he speaks on matters of religion. Nevertheless Field's speech had the effect of changing the entire atmosphere. The spirit of solemn awe was relaxed. The ghosts of the dead centuries drew further away. The spirit of controversy was aroused. Unfortunately the speaker who followed Field was a man named Paterson, an old minister of real piety but inelastic mind, who never lost an opportunity of girding at his brethren who professed more advanced views than himself. The old man leapt to his feet almost before Field had finished, and insisted on his right to speak. There were loud cries of "No," of which he took no notice. The Cardinal gave a courteous sign of assent, and Paterson at once began a vehement tirade against modern thought. He dragged in every possible reference to the real or supposed defections of faith of many of his brethren, which were calculated to excite irritation. How could men who didn't believe in the story of Jonah and the whale, he asked, believe in the resurrection of Christ, who used the Jonah story as the symbol of His own resurrection? Not to believe in Jonah was not to believe Christ. One would have supposed that the whole structure of Christianity rested on the whale. After a time he was silenced by the opposition of his audience; but the mischief was done. With the departure of awe and rever-

ence there entered not only the spirit of controversy, but the spirit of littleness. What was in reality one of the most solemn conclaves of the universal Church became the debating ground of rival views and fierce antagonisms.

The Cardinal watched the scene with a face of strained pallor. His thoughts were sad and bitter. So this was the Church of Christ, these its ministers. While the whole world waited breathlessly for some word of wise guidance, these men found it possible to indulge in recriminations, personal attacks, and theological animosities. What wonder that such a Church had lost its power to rule and guide the world? Surely the greatest of all miracles was that the Church of Christ had survived the incompetence and folly of its own professed leaders.

But after a time thoughts at once more generous and more just took possession of his mind. After all, these were good men, who not merely inculcated goodness but practised it. They touched the ark of the Lord with clumsy hands, but nevertheless they revered it. How often had he made the same discovery about his own clergy; how many men had he known who had possessed no gift of delicacy, men full of defect, who did and said things that were an offence to the spiritual mind, and yet were at heart sincerely pious, and in their lives were models of self-sacrifice. And he felt that this must

be true also of these men. He rose from his seat, and stretched out his hand with that commanding gesture which had so often subdued great throngs of men who had sought his interference in social disputes.

"Will you let me speak," he said. "Not in my position as the representative of a Church, but merely as a man, your brother?"

There was an instant silence of assent.

"There comes to me," he said, "with singular vividness, the recollection of an experience which happened to me many years ago, which I should like to relate. I was a young man at the time, full of the pride of strength and intellect, by turns a lover of the world and a critic of its life, in which I had already found much that was distasteful and repugnant. Already my vocation was decided: I was to enter the priesthood; but the nearer the day of my vows came, the more I shrank from assuming them. I was in great distress of mind, for nothing was clear to me except my own disinclination to enter on the work for which my whole life had been a preparation, and I was aware that the root of this disinclination lay in the unsettlement of my own faith. It pleases God to allow such darkness at times to rest upon the soul, that the hunger for light may be quickened. So I interpret the matter now, but at the time it seemed as if God had quite

forsaken me. From my confessors and advisers I got little help, for they were unable to comprehend the condition of my mind. At last, the thought came to me that it might be of service to me if I did what holy men in all ages have done, made my pilgrimage to those scenes hallowed by the earthly life of the Redeemer. I went to the Holy Land. I travelled on foot along the very roads that Christ had trodden, I looked upon the hills, still unchanged, that He had crossed, I sailed upon the lake He loved, I sat beside the well of which He drank: all the time, in each sacred scene, trying to arouse my mind by the poignant memories it suggested. Sometimes my mind responded, more often it remained dull and hard, and in this mood I came at last to Jerusalem. 'Here,' thought I, 'at the very altar of the faith, the miracle must happen; the stones must speak of Him, the very air retain His image.' So I stood at the very spot where He stood when He wept over Jerusalem, and saw the sunset burn upon the white walls of the city, and came down the hill as the moon rose, and knelt beside the olive garden of Gethsemane, but my heart remained unmoved. I pictured to myself each scene with all the imagination I could command; I stood where the Cross had rested, and before the tomb itself; but no darkness veiled the sky, no shining Figure moved amid the shadows of the garden; the sun shone insolently on

each sacred place, and the people came and went, but He came not. My pilgrimage was a failure. I said with Mary, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.' Anguish filled my heart. As the shores of Palestine faded from my eyes, I felt that I would gladly have died could I but have seen Jesus for one instant walking on the sea; ah, how gladly would I have flung myself into the sea, if I could have been sure that His eyes would have looked pitifully on me, as the waves closed over me."

He paused a moment, and a sigh of sympathy arose from his hearers.

"I came back to London," he continued. "During all those weary days and nights of travel one thought haunted me—the thought that if Christ really existed He could not leave me without a sign. I seemed to be travelling from Him; but some inner voice began to assure me that in reality I was travelling toward Him. That inner voice was but a whisper, the merest thread of sound in the forlorn abysses of my soul, but it never left me, and as I drew nearer England it became more positive. I landed as the grey evening was closing over the grey city. It was late at night when I came up the long, dull street, where was the house of a friend, in which I meant to spend the night. As I drew near the house I saw a spent and ragged figure leaning

against the iron railings of the house. I passed the figure with a casual glance, and stood before the door, with my hand upon the bell. Some strong instinct moved me to look again upon the ragged stranger. He stood there still, in an attitude of utter weariness; but in the moment our eyes met a strange alteration passed over him. He slowly raised himself from his stooping attitude; his pale face seemed to swim out of a sea of faint light; he stretched out a hand toward me, and I saw that it was stained with blood. I knew Him. It seemed as though the grey air ran past Him like a river with a thousand tongues each whispering His name. I felt no fear, no surprise; only a sweet awe, that dissolved my strength, that wrapped me round in folds of soft flame, that penetrated my cold heart, melting and subduing it. It was all the work of a moment, but the bliss of Eternity was in that moment. Even while I gazed, He vanished out of my sight. But a voice remained, and that voice said in a low, distinct whisper, 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, My brethren, ye do it unto Me.'

"Why do I tell you this story? Because for me it was the revelation that changed my whole life. I had sought to realise my Lord by merely thinking about Him; I had endeavoured to conjure back His presence by invoking the memories of His earthly life; the quest had been vain. But that day

I learned the supreme truth that the only way to realise Christ is to do the kind of things He did; it is deeds that make creeds, not creeds that make deeds. For thirty years I have chosen as my daily associates the most miserable of men; I have moved amid the realities of hunger, suffering, and misfortune; and my reward has been this, that in doing the kind of things Christ did, I have come to know that He was with me—not as an image of the mind, but as a Person, imparting to me daily strength for my task, using my hands, my will, my heart, for His work.

“And so, to-day, when the signs of His presence in the world seem open, when the whole earth appears to be conscious of His approaching footsteps, I see but one duty for us, His servants. It is to do His work, that we may meet Him without shame, when He appears. Let us hasten to lift up the fallen, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, while there is yet time. It is not for me to utter words of judgment or censure on His Church; but I do say, let us dissolve all the forms of our ecclesiastical existence, if needs be, in so far as they are the occasions of sloth or pride; and let us set about the practical business of making the world a little more like that kind of world which He desired and hoped for, and died to create. This, to me, is the supreme duty of the hour.”

The Cardinal sat down, shaken with emotion, and his emotion communicated itself to the whole assembly. Tears ran down many faces; sobs were heard; half-audible prayers arose from many lips.

But the fight was not won. The theological antagonisms of ages were not so easily dismissed. Hours passed, and the low afternoon sun shone into the hall of debate.

Outside the hall a vast crowd had gathered. They were waiting for the verdict. For the people realised even more keenly than the ministers that this was a great conclave of the Church universal, on whose word the world hung.

At one time it seemed as though any form of common action was impossible. There were those, and among them some of the most learned pastors of the city, who stubbornly refused to accept the story of Stockmar except as a species of devout hallucination. But even over these men, at last, the gentle influence of the Cardinal prevailed. The sunset light faded. Through the dusk of the long room the faces of the representatives showed pale and strained. Outside the murmur of the crowd rose and fell like a sea.

And then there happened one of those inspired accidents, which in times of crisis have so often turned the current of event. The murmur of the waiting crowd became articulate; it resolved itself

into a song, and the song was the old hymn which had been sung with such thrilling effect in West's church on the night of his memorable address.

Lo, He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain,
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train.
Hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign!

In an instant the whole assembly had sprung to its feet. It was as though the world had presented its demand to a reluctant Church.

West, who had hitherto taken no part in the debate, suddenly sprang forward. He stood with uplifted hand.

"Shall the multitude believe, the Church alone be faithless?" he cried.

And from the great company the reply was instantaneous.

Lo, He comes with clouds descending!

They were all singing now. For the most it was a moment of solemn ecstasy, in which faith rose triumphant over every difficulty. One by one the dissentients left the hall. They went out slowly, as if battling against a strong tide which they could not conquer.

"And he went out immediately, and it was night," said some one, in a voice of horror.

"Nay, my brethren," said the Cardinal, "let us not blame them. It is not Judas who goes out—only Thomas called Didymus. It may be that their hour will come, as it came to Thomas."

It was the last word of that memorable debate. A few minutes later the assembly passed in silence, and with bowed heads, a solemn resolution. The resolution affirmed, that the assembly accepted the story of Stockmar as substantially true; it called upon the Church to give itself to faith and good works, and especially to its great duty of social charity; and it proposed a week of prayer and humiliation for all the churches, that the Church might be prepared to meet its Lord.

The last word of the Cardinal was one that was never forgotten.

"And let us," he said, "the priests and teachers of religion, be the first to practise the humiliation we inculcate upon others."

XV

THE DEVIL'S KINGDOM

THE snow lay deep upon New York. Day after day grey, greasy clouds rolled up from the northwest, discharging their burden on the city, and fierce gales blew, and crippled ships, ice-sheathed, and battered by tremendous seas, crept into harbour. When the snow ceased, the merciless stricture of the frost fell on the city. In the northern sky banners of streaming flame flowed across the icy-pointed stars; flowed and ebbed, and seemed to break into a spray of fire. And from the distant forests of the north came strange stories, begotten of these midnight splendours, and shaped by the universal hope and fear; stories of a host seen marching through the sky, of the trampling of innumerable armies, and the noise of chariots and men on white horses who rode among the stars.

Among the nations, too, there were signs and portents, and wars and rumours of wars. In France the last blow had fallen on the Church, and the teaching of the Christian religion was prohibited by

law. In Austria the Emperor was dead, and the armies of Europe were like dogs, straining on the leash, eager to spring upon the prey. In England the Socialistic forces had at last found leadership, and wealth sat paralysed, terrified before the threatened storm. In New York a fierce anti-rent battle was raging among the poor of the East Side, and a Socialistic tribunal sat, dictating terms to the alarmed landlords. It would seem as if the whole order of the world was breaking up. The crash of commercial ruin filled the air. And everywhere amid the tumult, ran the whisper, "He comes, He comes." It was as though the earth itself shuddered at His footstep.

To a world thus perturbed came the voice of the Church in New York calling for prayer and humiliation.

The call found an instant response. In the poorer districts, particularly, the churches were thronged each evening. These great meetings resembled the primitive revival meetings of an earlier time. The speakers were often interrupted by the sobbings and loud wailings of their hearers; people fell on their knees groaning, as if smitten with a sudden intolerable pain; those who came to scoff were often the first to display these symptoms of fear and anguish. Sometimes a speaker, wrought into a dreadful ecstasy of vision, would picture the

coming judgment of the world in language so vivid that women fainted and strong men trembled. Thousands professed themselves suddenly converted, and night by night the ministers moved among throngs of weeping penitents. But while these manifestations were common in the poorer districts, it was noticeable that in the wealthier churches few people gathered. In these churches, where humiliation was most needed, there was none; rather a spirit of disdain, coloured by cold curiosity.

Among two classes of people there was more than disdain; there was growing anger and resentment. Mrs. Lorimer and her set represented one class.

"The world has gone mad," was her verdict on the situation. And her retort was an absolutely reckless plunge into the wildest forms of social pleasure. Night after night her windows flared with light; to her home, and a hundred others, gathered a restless host of people, eager to forget fears they would not acknowledge, in the pleasures of appetite and gambling, in every form of social extravagance and dissipation. Just as people in plague-stricken cities have danced the thought of death away, so these people defied the growing terror, and met it with reckless laughter.

Far down in the underworld of New York anger and resentment reigned also, but from another

cause. The saloon-keeper found his trade injured. The dancing-hall was deserted. And thus the Devil's kingdom was disturbed, and a wave of sullen wrath submerged it. Mrs. Lorimer gave her verdict, when she said "the world is mad"; Pat Maloney, saloon-keeper and dance-house proprietor, gave his, when he counted his lessening gains and said grimly, "This must be stopped."

It was ten o'clock in the evening—a bitter November night. The snow was piled high against the sidewalks, a shrewd wind swept the streets, and the stars shone like points of ice. In Mrs. Lorimer's house the card tables were arranged as usual, but on this night, for a wonder, she had few guests. There were two young girls, beautiful and vain; an old millionaire, who had long professed a passion for Mrs. Lorimer, and a young Englishman of good family, who had contrived to run through his fortune at five-and-twenty, and was now bent upon retrieving himself by judicious matrimony.

"I say," said the young Englishman, "I was reading in your papers this morning that there's some kind of fun coming off to-night down in a place they call the Tenderloin. Queer sort of name, isn't it? Don't know what it's all about, but a fellah at the club said there would be stacks of fun. Would be rather a lark to see it, wouldn't it?"

Mrs. Lorimer gave a judicious cough.

"I had not heard of it," she said. "It is not the sort of news in which we are interested."

"No, of course not; I apologise," said the young man. "But I like to see everything, and the fellah at the club said he knew some ladies who were going down in an auto. Kind of procession, got up by people who don't go to church and that sort of thing. Might be worth a look, just for the fun of the thing."

The two girls looked at one another and laughed.

"O, Mrs. Lorimer," said one, "let us go. It would be such fun, and we'd be safe enough in the auto."

"I'm sure we want something to wake us up," said the other. "My people have done nothing but go to church all the week."

"Yes, do," cried the other. "We've plenty of time for a game first, you know."

"What do you say?" said Mrs. Lorimer, turning to the old millionaire.

"I go anywhere you go," he said, in his growling guttural voice. "It can't be much worse than an election night, anyway."

"Very well," said Mrs. Lorimer; "I'm sure I'm glad New York has spirit enough for anything vivacious."

The project was not at all to her mind, but since the day when West had talked with her, she had

changed much and for the worse. She no longer pretended to take the faintest interest in religion. The conversion of her brother Payson had excited in her the wildest antipathy. It was from that moment that she dated her plunge into extravagant excitement. She had but one formula to apply to him, and West, and the entire movement which they represented—"the world was mad." And so she cast off restraint, and in a spirit of defiance called around her those whose frivolity was proof against all serious thought.

The little party sat down to bridge, all save the old millionaire, who promptly fell asleep in an arm-chair. During the last month she had lost heavily at the game, and with each loss her passion for it had increased. It was no longer the game she cared for: it was the gain. If any one had told her she was a common gambler, that she had made her house a gambling house, that there were half a dozen girls who sat in terror, recollecting the immense losses they had incurred at the tables, that these girls were afraid to enter her house again; if any one had told her these things, she would no longer have taken the trouble to defend herself. She did not care. She was even glad to be relieved of the necessity of keeping up appearances. She knew she was becoming notorious, but even that was better than to be unnoticed. As for religion,

never having known it, she could not regret its loss. It had never been more than a pretence, and she now repudiated it with a violence that was almost insane.

"Never darken my doors again," she had said to her brother. "And don't think I'll help you when you've lost all your money. I'll see you starve first."

"He's bewitched by a pious face, and calls it religion," she had said to her friends.

And so she turned from him, as she had turned from West; and, with the haggard eagerness of one no longer young, snatched at the flying robe of pleasure.

The game was over at last. It was a dull game, a mere makeshift to kill time. A servant entered, saying the auto was at the door. In a few moments the party was ready, each clothed in heavy furs to resist the bitter cold.

As they came out of the brilliantly lighted hall into the spacious night Mrs. Lorimer noticed a man standing silent against the high bank of snow. He appeared to be unusually tall; he was thinly clad in what seemed a long robe of some dark material; his hair was dark and heavy, falling on the shoulders. He stood as erect and still as a statue, his face glimmering white in the icy starshine. A curious uneasiness seized Mrs. Lorimer as she looked on

him; something that was almost a shudder. The pale face drew her eyes with an irresistible attraction. Her first thought was that he was probably some wandering fanatic, of whom there were many in New York in these days. But this impression was at once corrected by the calmness of the man. He did not speak; his white face, slightly lifted, seemed fixed upon the stars, which were reflected in his sad and piercing eyes. Yet she was aware that those eyes searched her: they observed every detail of her costly dress, her jewels, and the luxurious auto drawn up against the curb. It was with an effort that she said, "Do you want anything?"

He shook his head.

"Then you had better move on. You must not stand there."

Still he did not speak.

"Do you hear?" she said angrily. "You must go away. Don't you understand?"

"I understand everything," he said slowly. "I know that I am not wanted."

"Then go."

"Is that all you have to say to one who has no place where to lay his head?" he asked.

For answer she turned to the man-servant who stood in the porch, his arms piled with costly rugs.

"John," she said, "telephone the police. Tell them to have the house watched."

She swept past the silent figure haughtily, and stepped into the auto.

The man said nothing. He lifted his hand in mute protest, and turned away, disappearing in the snowdrifted street.

"That's a rum go," said the young Englishman. "What did the fellow want? Looked as if he was hungry."

"O, you can never tell," she said, with a forced smile. "I dare say he knows well enough how to take care of himself. I never give to beggars."

"O, by Jove, now, that's rather hard, isn't it?" said the youth. "I always do. Might be one yourself some day, you know."

"We'll hope not," she said acridly.

"You can never tell," said the wise youth. "A fellow gave me a dollar once when I was stony broke in Rio. Never forgot it, you know. Didn't know me from Adam, either. You don't forget a thing like that."

The auto had started, and the conversation was not continued. The swift air beat upon their faces, the wheels churned the snow, the great lighted city ran past like a ribbon of coloured flame. It was a wonderful spectacle; abysses of gloom instantly traversed, lonely as the depths of space, Sherman's golden statue silhouetted for a moment on a sky polished and glittering as ice, the vast bulk of the

Plaza lifting itself like a mountain of stars into the dark air, rivers of fire running along the architraves of theatres and the eaves of mighty houses; cars, brilliantly illumined, twisting like fiery serpents on the air, as though they scorned the earth; and they themselves seated in the heart of a strange monster, that leapt forward at a touch, like a sentient thing, rushed and leapt and trembled at a finger's pressure, and seemed capable of soaring up until its wheels took a road of stars, and found their liberty in the uncharted firmament. A wonderful ride, more magical than anything pictured by Arabian dreamers, and as they sped forward its intense exhilaration drowned all other thoughts, especially that uneasy thought begotten by the vision of that solitary man among the snowdrifts, who had no place where to lay his head.

The auto slowed at last. They had come upon a crowded street. At the end of the street red lights wavered, and the clash of a band was heard.

"By Jove, that's the procession they talked about," said the youth. "Here they come."

The auto had stopped close to a vast dance-hall. The doors were wide open, and they could see within the lights reflected on the polished floor an immense bar, and behind it white-clothed men waiting for the crowd.

Then, at last, the procession came into view. It was a Saturnalia. Men, disguised in grotesque masks, led the way, blowing with all their might upon discordant horns. A regiment of women followed, painted, laughing, dancing, holding hands, mad with evil glee, their feathered hats falling on their shoulders. Half-intoxicated youths surrounded them, shouting ribald jests and singing ribald songs. Some carried wands, on which bunches of withered flowers were tied; others waved Roman candles, which shot up fountains of coloured flame, and broke in a thousand sparks. Behind the revellers clashed the band in raucous music. High over all, riding on a black horse, was the huge form of Pat Maloney, carrying a banner. The banner was blood-red, and upon it, in white, was a cross reversed. Other banners followed, each with some profane or blasphemous inscription. One banner was black, and its white lettering read, "Good Old Devil." This was the worst, but others were nearly as bad. A wild rabble followed, shouting and yelling. The depths of New York had spued out all their infamy. Everywhere were faces scarred by evil passions, stamped with crime, scowling with hatred of all things good and pure—for this was the Devil's Kingdom let loose. And high over all was the man on the black horse, with the cross reversed—a man gross, terrible, triumphant, smiling

at the riot, secure at least for one night in the certainty of gain.

It was a hideous spectacle. Mrs. Lorimer shuddered, and the two girls hid their faces. "I say," said the youth, "I don't like this, you know. Let us go."

But they could not go. They were held against the curb by the pressure of the multitude. They were forced to observe every hideous detail, to hear the ribald jests, to watch through the open doors of the dance-hall the beginning of the carnival.

Suddenly Mrs. Lorimer rose up with a cry of fear. "There he is again—that man!" she shrieked.

They turned at her cry. Yes, there he was; the same long dark robe, the same pale face: but they could see it now. It had a singular sad majesty. The eyes were full of reproach. He came slowly through the throng, as though he felt no obstacle. No one spoke to him, no one challenged him. But suddenly the uproar ceased. He stood a moment at the open doors of the dance-house, stretching out his hands to those within, in a gesture that seemed full of pity and appeal. Then he turned slowly, and seemed to melt into the darkness. Mrs. Lorimer had fainted.

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Towards the dawn, following this same night, in a cellar of a tenement house not far from Pat Ma-

loney's dance-hall, three men and a woman were huddled in uneasy slumber. The men were thieves. One of them had spent twenty years in prison. In those twenty years he had been flogged till his flesh hung in strips: he had endured the water torture, which means being handcuffed to a cross, and played upon by a powerful hydrant till the flesh was black; he had endured two years of solitary confinement in a dark cell underground, where he tamed rats to save himself from madness, and out of which he came nearly blind. He had been ordered out of every city at twenty-four hours' notice. His portrait was in every police station in the gallery of dangerous criminals. His comrades were, like himself, proscribed men. They and he alike had found all doors closed to them; had starved, tramped, fled from city to city, robbed and stolen; and the one passion that had kept them alive was revenge, the hope of getting even with a world that hated them. The woman was an outcast. She had that night followed the procession: her tawdry hat lay beside her as she slept. Even Pat Maloney had thought her too low to allow her entrance to his dance-hall, from which she had been driven with cruel jests.

She slept now, tired out, her head upon her arm. The men drowsed against the wall, their faces bowed upon their knees, huddling their rags round them against the bitter cold.

Suddenly there was a knocking at the door. It was a low knock, quiet and repeated.

All four sat up in instant alarm.

"That's them," said one man, in a whisper. "Let them look out. If they've come for me, there will be murder."

"No, it's not the police," said the man who had been twenty years in prison. "They don't knock like that."

One of the men struck a match. Its faint light showed four white faces, each strained toward the door.

"I was dreaming," said the woman; "I dreamt I was at home. I wish I hadn't wakened."

"Hush," said the others.

They rose soundlessly, and moved on stealthy feet to the door. The knocking came again, very soft and low.

"I guess it's all right," said one. "Let us open the door."

They unbarred the door. On its threshold stood a tall man, clothed in dark raiment, with dark hair falling on his shoulders. His face was very pale; his eyes glittered in the frosty dawnlight. He held a little child upon his bosom.

"You need not be afraid," he said quietly. "I ask nothing more than shelter. I am very tired."

"Come in then, comrade," said the twenty years' man. "I've been tired myself. You're welcome."

He came in, leaving the door open behind him. No one noticed that it was left open. The grey dawnlight came in with him.

The men made room, but he did not sit down. He stood quite still, looking at them one by one.

There was something in his face that moved them strangely. The three men hung their heads; the woman bowed hers upon her hands, and began to weep.

"I was dreaming I was at home," she murmured. "Somehow, you make me think of home, too."

"You are not so far from home as you think," the stranger said, in a low voice.

She looked up, and for the first time seemed to observe the child upon the man's bosom.

"What have you there?" she said.

"A little child. A child such as you were once. I found him in the snow. He was lost. Like you," he added, slowly.

"Yes, that's true. O, my God, that's true!" she cried. A fit of sobbing shook her.

Presently she stood up. "May I look at him?" she said timidly.

For answer the man placed the sleeping child in her arms.

"The pretty dear," she whispered. She drew her

fingers through the child's hair, and held him against her bosom.

"Do you think I might kiss him?" she said.

"Kiss him," said the man.

She did so shrinkingly. Then, as if a warmth of motherhood suddenly inflamed her, she kissed him hungrily, his forehead, his hair, his sleeping eyes, his little hands, doubled in the innocence of sleep.

The men watched the strange scene fascinated, and while they watched the dawnlight grew fuller. It came in growing waves and undulations and touched the form of the stranger, and each instant he seemed to grow taller and more distinct.

The man who had been in prison twenty years spoke first.

"Who are you?" he cried.

"One who loves you," he replied. "One who loves all women, all children, all men, but especially those whom no one else loves."

"I've never met a man like you," he answered.

"Almost all the men I meet hate me, and therefore I hate them."

"But you don't hate me?"

"No," he said humbly. "I think I could love you, if you'd give me the chance."

"I've always loved you," the man replied.

"But I've never seen you before, how could you love me?"

"I've seen you, Peter Bernson. I was with you in prison. And you, and you," he said, turning to the other men, and calling them by name. "And you, poor woman, who have not forgotten how to love a little child. I came here to tell you this."

And then a beautiful and curious change passed upon the stranger. It was as though the dawnlight clothed him, and his face grew bright and glad. He stretched out his hand to each in turn, and each bowed the head instinctively.

"I am your Friend," he said. "Henceforth be mine. I shall always remember that this night when the rich rejected me, you received me."

They looked up, but he was gone.

The men stood stupefied, gazing with eyes of wonder through the empty door.

But the woman smiled, for the Man had left the little child behind. It lay asleep upon her bosom. Through the open door the golden day rolled in.

XVI

HOW LONG, O LORD!

IN the midst of all the popular commotion Mercy Lane pursued her quiet tasks of charity. West and Payson Hume accompanied her; Hume almost constantly, West as often as his increasing public labours would permit.

For each of these men Mercy Lane's work was a revelation. She was their guide through populous infernos of human misery, the very existence of which they had not so much as suspected. The thronged tenements, the crowded cellars, the wan, patient people, the relentless struggle for bread, the almost uncounted multitude for whom life held little brightness and no hope—this was the vision that met them everywhere. Payson Hume, in his new-born enthusiasm of charity, did not realise it in the same way that West did. He poured out his money lavishly, and rejoiced in the good it did, but he was too little accustomed to patient and philosophic thought to grasp either the nature or the dimension of the dreadful problem. But West's mind was of a different order; to him the ordeal was much more

terrible, because he had the vision which discerns causes as well as effects.

"O, my God," he groaned, as he returned from one of these excursions, "twenty centuries of Christianity, and this the end of it all! Well may a martyred world moan beneath the feet of God, 'How long, O Lord, how long?'"

For he saw, with growing distinctness, that while Christianity undoubtedly held the solution of all social misery, the secret of all social happiness, its followers had reduced it to impotence by their own refusal to accept its social teachings. He himself had done so, though unwittingly, and if he reproached others, his own self-reproach was infinitely more bitter. Here was a religion born in the heart of a Poor Man, which set out to redeem the poor. There was no doubt of that. Every word that Christ had spoken throbbed with compassion for the poor. He was their friend; He was the friend of the Lazarus at the gate; He saw riches as a terrible hindrance to right living; He counselled men to cast them away; He preached a simple life, contented and laborious, as the one kind of life that prepared men for life hereafter. His own great powers He had never used for any selfish purpose. And His own wonderful life taught men that it was possible to possess nothing, and yet possess all things.

West saw that for a time, how brief a time, the spirit of the Master survived Him, though very early in the Church an Ananias and a Demas appeared. Nevertheless the early Church was the visible bodiment of Christ's ideals. Its apostles and teachers possessed nothing. They exemplified the power and beauty of a life without selfish ambitions. And then had happened a disastrous change; Christianity had become powerful enough to attract the attention of the world-rulers.

From that moment the true spirit of Christianity evaporated. It was no longer a confederation of the poor. It had its own lords and princes, who contended with the princes of the world for the secular sceptre. Then arose vast cathedrals, abbeys, monasteries, ecclesiastical palaces, built at a cost of millions of money, in which the princes of the Church lived luxurious lives, or moved in all the circumstance of earthly pomp. The successors of the man who had but one frayed woven garment, and no place where to lay His head, were clothed with purple, and slept in beds of state. There was no longer any effort to apply Christ's social teachings; for very shame the Church was silent. But instead the Church built up a mighty scheme of doctrine: made the way in which men believed upon these doctrines the test of life and death; persecuted for these doctrines, fought battles for them, burned

and tortured for them; and so long as men professed these doctrines let them go their way, and live as they chose, according to the dictates of their own greed or ambition.

Of course, reformations of one kind or another had come at intervals. From time to time, when the ecclesiastical yoke had become intolerable, some Moses had arisen who had led the people into the desert of freedom. But what did it all amount to? They took their Egypt with them. Once free, once powerful and triumphant, the reformers themselves began to reproduce the past they had repudiated. Doctrine reigned again, a new doctrine, but with the same intolerance. The rich once more began to rule; and all those teachings of Christ's which condemned their way of life were quietly ignored. And so it had gone on; till the twentieth century of Christianity displayed this amazing spectacle: all the means of life in the hands of the wealthy few, who took toll for every mouthful of food which the poor man ate; Christian cities, full of churches, in which Christ was adored, with more flagrant contrasts of extreme wealth and extreme poverty than Rome displayed in the most corrupt period of her decadence; and instead of that simplicity of life which Christ taught, a wild extravagance, rising almost to insane waste among the wealthy, quite unparalleled in any previous era of the world. That

was what had come of disregarding Christ's social teachings.

And it was little to the purpose to reply that there was a great deal of charity in the world, and that the Church, after all, was the fountain of this charity. It was much easier to be charitable than to be just. And of all the fearful ironies of life, surely this was the worst, that men who stole millions from society with one hand, thought their crime thoroughly atoned when they gave doles with the other. It was as though a robber should plead that, while it was perfectly true that he had inflicted a gaping wound upon an innocent man, yet he had atoned for everything by contributing to the hospital in which he was healed.

It was *the system* of society that was wrong—that is what West had come to see; and the Church was simply part of the social system. It had no method of life separate and distinct from the life of the world. It was built up from the same materials as society in general,—a little altered in form, but substantially the same. Again and again, as he came home from his incursions into that dim underworld where Mercy Lane's slender taper of charity cast a holy beam, the terrible question of the Master rang through his mind: "When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?" And he replied that it was only by the

coming of the Son of Man that faith could be revived. Christ had started the world right once; He must surely come again to give it a fresh start. The task was wholly beyond His disciples. And from those grey tenement houses, from those tombs of the spirit where souls lay in bondage, from every life spoiled by the lust and greed of men, it seemed the cry went forth in its agonising challenge and complaint, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

Could anything be done? That was the question which tortured him night and day. And the more he considered it, the clearer became his belief that out of the existing instability there must emerge some new foundations for a better social system. And there was an increasing body of men who shared his conviction. Field, Stockmar, the Cardinal, each in his own way had a vision of reconstruction.

One night the three men sat together in Field's quiet library. It was the night which followed the events narrated in the previous chapter. Every reputable paper in New York had commented severely on the saturnalia of Pat Maloney; the exception had been the *Yellow Press*, which had treated it in the usual spirit of vivacious cynicism.

West was the first to speak. Was it not possible, he asked, to do something more than call the Church

to humiliation and prayer? It was notorious that that appeal had been but partially successful.

"It came too late," Field replied. "It has always been the fault of the Church that it comes too late. It follows where it should lead, and it follows reluctantly."

"Yes, I admit that," said West. "But let us be thankful that it has spoken at all."

"That may be a cause for gratitude, but not of congratulation," Field replied. "Can you think of one great cause of reform, in which the Church has been the real leader, the first to speak, the first to act? I confess that I cannot. In England the Established Church has consistently opposed almost every popular reform. In America a large section of the Church supported negro slavery, the whole Church, indeed, in those States where slavery existed. It is only when the people imposes its ideas upon the Church that it adopts them. I do not profess to explain the phenomenon; but I see its result. The result is that the Church is distrusted, even when it is willing to take the right course."

"And I, alas! can explain the phenomenon," said West sadly. "The interests of the world, that is, of the selfish world, are so interwoven with the interests of the Church that it cannot act as its better spirit would dictate."

There was a long silence, and then at last the Cardinal spoke.

"I am not prepared to argue the point," he said, "because I think we have come to a point where such argument is quite useless. Would it not be better to discuss what can actually be done in the present crisis? And remember what that crisis is. A great fear lies upon the earth, and all things are shaken."

"Fear, yes," said West. "And it is in that very fear that I find peril."

"Peril of what?" said Field.

"Of moral stupefaction. I had hoped that this awful certainty that Christ was again visiting His world would have roused a general spirit of reform. Instead of that, what is happening? Men are saying, 'It is no good: the end of all things is at hand.' They see thrones falling, they hear the growing thunder of war, they feel the throbb of the earthquake beneath their feet; and instead of setting their house in order, they sit still in a spirit of dull fatalism. They do not think of Christ coming to make all things new, to give the world a fresh chance, to refashion the Church and society: no; they think that if His coming means anything, it means the final catastrophe. And that is not my interpretation of these events. To me they are a call to action."

"Yes, we all feel that," said the Cardinal. "When Christ came before, it was not to destroy, but to fulfil. It will be so again."

"But chiefly to fulfil His own purposes in and through His Church, I think," said West. "Cardinal, let me try to express my thought, and pardon me if I do so crudely. I want to see a new Church, more like that which Christ Himself designed, if indeed He designed any, which I think doubtful. I want to see a society of loving and faithful men, who live simply, and spend their time in good works, as the first Christians did. I want to see the Church freed from the domination of the rich, freed from all the pomp and pride of æsthetic worship. I think of the Master as He lived in His earthly life, the enemy of all ostentation, delighting in the friendship of simple people, careless of forms and conventions, and I cannot think of Him as changed by centuries of absence in the courts of God. I think of Him as the great arbiter of social justice, vindicating the poor against the tyranny of the rich, and I want to see a Church that cares more for social justice than elaborate theologies. Can we not create such a Church?"

"Does not such a Church already exist?" said the Cardinal.

"A Church whose main ideal is social justice certainly does not exist," said West. "I don't say

that the ideal is not *in* the Church; but it is not the main ideal. The Church has forgotten righteousness. Take the case of this anti-rent war on the East Side. Here are tens of thousands of people who are paying more in proportion for the vilest dens than the rich pay for their palaces of marble. The Church has known all about it for a generation. Yet it has said nothing, done nothing. It is left for the Socialists to vindicate the people against their oppressors. For the Socialists remember what the Church, in its battles for faith and creed, has forgotten—righteousness.”

“Not wholly, never wholly,” said the Cardinal.

“No, not wholly,” West retorted; “but let me ask one question. Can we suppose that the Workingman of Nazareth would approve the Church as it is? As for me, I am overwhelmed with shame when I remember what my life has been as a Christian minister. I am not rich, I have never cared for luxury; but when I think of what His life was, I know that in comparison I have been clothed in fine linen and have fared sumptuously every day like Dives. I have behaved myself no better and no worse than a thousand of my fellows, it is true, but I think of the astonishment with which He would regard my mode of life. And I picture Him as entering churches like yours and mine, temples furnished with every luxury and comfort for the

worshipper, and I can only think of Him as once more disdaining the costly marbles, and closing His ears to the costly music, and going out to find His true friends among the humble poor, as He did a hundred times when He turned His back upon the priests of the ancient temple, and sought the society of simple fishermen upon the shores of Galilee. Cardinal, it is all wrong. And it is all the more wrong because we see what our methods have wrought, what is their fruit; more poverty by far in the world than when He came, and more social injustice than He ever looked upon in all the days of that earthly life in Palestine."

West paused, overcome with emotion.

"Yes, that is what we want," said Stockmar.

"Go on," said the Cardinal.

"There is nothing more to say," West replied. "Except this: that it seems to me that this is what His coming means to me."

"And to me," said the Cardinal. "And yet I would remind you that in my Church such ideals have always been respected; nay, they have always triumphed. We have had our Francis, our Loyola, our Vincent de Paul."

"And before Francis died his ideal was dead among his followers, and as for Loyola, you know, Cardinal, what happened," said Field.

"Yes, yes, it is true," said the Cardinal, in great agitation.

He rose and paced up and down the room, his pale, earnest face bowed upon his breast.

"It is true," he repeated. "But I cannot think quite as you think, and I pray forgiveness if I am wrong. Do you recollect the story of St. Bernard? The good saint had been sadly repeating for years that the world was very evil, and that its end was near. Then he went to Rome, and saw that the Church was full of good people after all—mothers who cared for their children, rich women who gave themselves to good works, men who had wealth, but were nevertheless humble in mind and simple in life; and he came back, saying, 'After all, these people love God.' And it is so I see the Church—much of evil in it, but how much more of good, how many just and kindly people who shall say? But surely a great multitude."

"I was talking with an old man the other day," said Field, "in my consulting-room. He was upon the verge of nervous collapse, and when I enquired the cause, he told me a painful story of a church quarrel, in which he and his family had been involved. I said to him: 'Then why do you stay in the church? Leave it.' To my astonishment the tears ran down his face, and he replied: 'Doctor, I can't. The Church is, after all, the best thing we

have in the world. I can't leave it.' I have thought a good deal about that answer. It seems to me that there is something approaching heroism in the fine fidelity of that old man. And I think he was right in the main. The Church is the best thing we have in the world. Even Carlyle admitted in his last days that the best people he had ever met were the Christian people."

"Yes," said the Cardinal. "I think any competent observer would admit that. I think that our very anger against the evils that have found their way into the Church often blinds us to the immense stores of good which it contains: the kindness, and generosity, and real devotion of myriads of quiet folk, whose lives run an unseen course."

"O, don't think I doubt it," said West eagerly. "But surely that is an evasion of the point—the commonest kind of evasion. The moment you attack the Church you are told that the best people on earth are in the Church, as if that settled everything. It settles nothing. You may meet people of personal goodness anywhere—in prisons, in saloons, among millionaires who live by licensed robbery. But that doesn't prove the prison good, or the saloon good, or the financial system of predatory wealth good. There must have been hundreds of good men among the Pharisees, and yet you know what Christ said of them. Pharisaism was

not good, whatever the Pharisee was; and I say the Church may be wholly wrong in her methods, however good the individual church-goer may be. Your St. Bernard was right, after all, when he condemned the corruption of the Church, and his sudden discovery of good people in the Church altered nothing. You may find lilies in mud, but the mud remains."

West paused a moment. He found it difficult to express the thought that tortured him. The Cardinal, aware of his embarrassment, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and said, "I think I know what you mean."

"I believe you do," said West humbly, "and you are a thousandfold better able to express it than I. Yet I think it can be put in a sentence."

"And that sentence?" said the Cardinal.

"The Socialisation of Christianity," said West.

"And that means—just what?"

"It means social justice. It means a Church which makes social justice the supreme aim. It means that justice shall take the place of philanthropy. It means that the Church must no longer be content to deal with individuals, but must deal with the social conditions of the common life,—conditions which we all know to be so hostile to the individual that they constantly defeat our best

efforts to win him to holiness of life. When Christ comes He expects to find not isolated individuals who believe in Him, and order life by His rule, but a Kingdom of men, coherent and universal, founded on His ideals. Thy Kingdom come."

"Yet Christ Himself was content to work through individuals," said the Cardinal.

"Through them, yes; but toward what? Towards social confederation. He had to choose men one by one, and train them; but He had no sooner done this, than He banded them together, taught them to reproduce His own life, and so generated a real social force, with a method and spirit of its own, which acted directly on the general life. O, cannot we establish such a society again—a real Church, with few forms and ceremonies, with no dogma save love to Christ and men, an example of high and simple living, a force for justice—a refuge and tribunal of the poor?—Ah, it is when I think of the poor that my heart breaks, that I am covered with confusion—for He was poor, a humble, toiling man. He ascended into Heaven? Yes, He ascended too far. We have forgotten the carpenter, thought only of the God moving through the thunders of eternal Hallelujahs, Lord of the hosts of Heaven. And in turn we also sing our earthly Hallelujahs, our thoughts ascend into Heaven, and we do not see men who toil as He

toiled, but with much less leisure, with no green hills where they can pray and meditate, no lake of peace where they may cool their tired feet—only the hard, grievous streets of cities, where they are scorned because their hands are toil-worn and their raiment coarse. And so He comes again to teach us our forgotten duty, comes to peasants in the fields, comes to outcasts.—And for me, I fear the eyes of the Workingman of Nazareth far more than I should fear Him, whom John saw, sitting on the clouds with the seven stars in His hands and crowns upon His head. Yes; I am afraid——”

He ceased suddenly. He sat with his head bowed upon his hands, and sobs shook him.

“O, Thou divine Workingman, forgive me, forgive us all!” he prayed.

A New Church—for a moment a vision, vague and alluring, passed before the eyes of these three men who shared West's emotion. Each saw it in his own way. For one brief illumined moment it hung clear as a picture painted on the air, a kind of spiritual mirage. They saw in it the reunion of mankind; the long war of class against class healed in eternal truce; love, not dogma, as the bond of union; happiness no longer postponed to realms beyond the grave, but the present wealth of life; and the basis of this happiness righteousness, social righteousness, which made cruelty and

greed impossible. The vision passed through the mind of each like a strain of music.

The Cardinal was the first to speak.

"Alas! it cannot be," he said, in faltering accents.

"Why not?" said West.

"The Church is too deeply imbedded in tradition," he replied. "Nothing but an earthquake can free her."

"And the earthquake is here," said West. "All things are shaken that that which cannot be shaken may remain."

"It seems so," said the Cardinal. "We have all been unfaithful stewards. It may be that the stewardship is about to be taken from our unworthy hands. Even Rome herself must surrender the keys of Peter when Peter's Master comes. I feel that the old is passing, and that He who makes all things new is here. And it may be that He comes to create the new Church of which you speak, to realise the divine dream dreamed long ago in Galilee. I can but say humbly for myself that I am willing to leave all and follow Him. But He alone can do this thing; we cannot. We can but pray, as men have prayed for ages, Thy Kingdom come."

"Let us pray for the earthquake, then," said West. "He shook the earth in dying; what wonder if it be again shaken at His coming? And if once

more the veil of the temple be rent in twain, so be it."

The Cardinal bowed his head and said, "Amen." Field and Stockmar also said, "Amen."

And to these four men, the vague, alluring vision was no longer but a mirage, beautiful and bodiless.

It was the very City of God, the embodied dream of all the wise and just souls of all the ages;—above all, His dream, who dreamed true, even when the last darkness gathered in His eyes, knowing Himself lifted up only that all men might be gathered to Him—it was this they saw, splendid and imperishable, rising out of the wrecks of Time.

XVII

THE SIGN

“**D**O you think she will live?”

The words were spoken in a whisper.
The speaker was Mrs. Parke.

She stood outside the bedroom door, talking to the Doctor, an old baldheaded man, with a fresh apple-wrinkled face, a small doubtful mouth, and kind brown eyes, which gleamed through gold-rimmed spectacles. It was the third day of Helen's illness, and the worst symptoms of pneumonia had declared themselves.

Upon an old-fashioned four-post bed, with a canopy and curtains of spotless white, Helen lay in the slumber of exhaustion. The room was the room in which she was born. It was furnished with old Colonial furniture, of dark, finely grained mahogany, solid and beautiful. Everything in the room conveyed the air of antiquity and austerity. The walls were unadorned, save for one small picture of a Madonna and a Child, which her grandfather had brought from Italy more than half a century before. A small table, on which her fa-

avourite books lay, stood beside the bed. One of them lay open. It was the book she had last read on the night when her illness had begun. Beside it lay a letter from her husband.

"Do you think she will live?"

The doctor replied with a slight movement of his head, and the ambiguous smile of the physician—that smile which conceals so much, and is therefore more to be dreaded than any speech.

"Who can say?" he said, at last. "She is doing well. But I think her husband should be sent for."

"He is already on his way."

"That is well," said the doctor.

Tears gathered in the dimmed blue eyes and overflowed.

"Do not be too much alarmed," said the old man gently. "She is young. She has a good fighting chance."

"Ah, but she is not using it," said Mrs. Parke, with a flash of anguished insight.

And that was the really serious thing, as both knew. There are those who cling to life inch by inch, fibre by fibre, and they tire out death by their resistance. But when the fingers cling no more to life, when they relax in contented weakness and decline the struggle, death finds his opportunity. And this was Helen's case. She did not try

to swim against the mighty current. She was tired, and her will was spent. And now the stream was carrying her far and farther every hour, bearing her out to sea, that sea of silence which receives all and gives back nothing.

From the hour of her interview with Dr. Littleton she had drooped. And then that invisible assailant, who watches for our hour of weakness with a deadly patience, had found his chance. An arrow of ice sped silently upon the bitter wind, and smote her.

She was scarcely conscious of the wound at first. She had heard a paper read at the Ethical Society that afternoon, had come home tired, and gone early to bed. She had lain awake for hours, thinking with unusual vividness of the past. She had been born in that room, and to beguile her mind she set herself to recollect all she could of the past. She was surprised at her power of reminiscence. She could scarcely have been two when she sat yonder by the window, playing with a sunbeam and calling it God—she remembered clearly how she had been rebuked for her innocent idolatry. Beside the same window she had learned to read—not fable or romance, that was forbidden,—but some dry moral story about the evil of untruthfulness; that was her austere introduction to literature. Then the picture on the wall had attracted her; the pale-faced woman

with the sad-eyed, wondering child in her arms fascinated her, and that was her introduction to the world of grief. She pitied her exceedingly. The picture hung over the mantel, and for a time she used to place every day beneath it a little offering of flowers. The pale-faced woman seemed to smile benignly on her gift, but the shadow of grief always lay within those dark eyes, and on that wistful mouth. Why was she so sad? Perhaps it was that the child was going to die, and she knew it. Children did sometimes die—she had found out that,—and she wondered what it meant, and whether it hurt much. One day her offerings of flowers were discovered, and once more she was rebuked. It seemed to her that she was always being rebuked. Whenever her imagination spread its wings, she was instantly dragged back to earth, like a kite. She smiled sadly at the thought. How different might her life have been had her imagination been nourished and directed, instead of suppressed!

But it was always suppressed; suppression had been the dominant note of her bleak childhood. She saw various human shadows move across the room—her father, her grandfather, her grandmother; they were all of the same type, their faces all had the same bleak light upon them. It was like the light that filled the room when snow lay

on the ground, pale, pure, hard. Their very lips seemed frozen. She never heard them laugh. Little frozen maxims fell from those straight lips, which chilled the air. Her mother was different—at first. But she soon grew like the rest, except that she sometimes said things that were shrewd enough to seem like wit. But they were all alike in this, that they saw life in hard outlines, utterly without shadows. There was something desiccating in the very air of that prim house. Her father, as he grew older, had a look of even physical desiccation; he sat for hours reading dry books, turning the pages with thin, bloodless hands. Sometimes she regarded these people as a kind of dreadful automata. The pale-faced woman in the picture seemed much more alive than they.

Her father's thin bloodless hands had a curious fascination for her. She would watch them furtively for hours as he read. They looked so brittle, she expected them to break off some day.

On the day when her father died, there came to her, for the first time, a sense of mystery in life. Where had he gone? What had really happened to him? She saw him lying very still like a figure carved in ivory. This continued several days. A pale light filled the room. He lay quite alone, but he made no complaint. Then he disappeared, and she knew vaguely that he would appear no more.

But where had he gone? She was told he was in heaven, but the answer conveyed nothing to her mind. She could not picture him in any other way than as sitting in a high-backed chair, with a book upon his knees, reading or sleeping. This seemed incongruous. Later on she saw his grave, and the contradiction was obvious. She did not know what to think. Perhaps the dark-eyed woman in the picture knew all about it. She had grown wise, watching the grief of the world, and her lips smiled inscrutably. But whatever secret lay behind that inscrutable face, it was incommunicable.

She listened eagerly in church on Sundays for some word that should make things clear, but it never came. Once she heard a sermon on heaven. Heaven, it appeared, was a place of infinite delight to which people went if they were good; but it struck her as a strange contradiction that no one seemed very anxious to go there. She would have liked to go that very afternoon, so bright, so alluring was the picture presented to her heart. When she spoke her thought she was once more rebuked, and made to feel foolish for having entertained it. From that hour it seemed to her that awe and wonder passed out of her life. She began to see what lay around her with new distinctness, but the beautiful far-off things that lay like tinted clouds on the horizon of her mind, slowly dissolved

and withdrew. And, as she lay thinking, she began to see for the first time the nature of the wrong that had been done her. She had been denied the exercise of her imagination. She had been forced into a life of mathematical rigidity, all plain lines and angles, nowhere sweet curves, nowhere a touch of colour. Ah, how different might she have been if her imagination had been nourished—she might then, perhaps, have understood Francis and his strange visions!—and with that a sharp anguish smote her. She sat up in bed and read his last letter slowly; but the lines wavered, her head fell forward in utter weariness. She became conscious of something happening to her which loosened all the sinews of her strength, and dimmed her eyes. She was going to be ill, possibly to die. Well, perhaps it was best so; she had nothing left to live for.

Yes, she had one thing; she had that intellectual integrity of which Dr. Littleton had spoken so lightly. Her mind was quite lucid now. She prayed that it might continue so. She was going to be ill, and in illness strange things happened, and often a thing both strange and pitiable, that men did in the hour of weakness what they would have scorned in the day of strength. She had read of such things; sudden repudiations of lifelong conviction, reversals, recantations, and she had always

felt something shameful in them. Things surely remained true or false, whatever happened; why should their value be altered by something that happened to the body? Yet, even now she was conscious of these altering values. Had not something in her heart cried out to that Woman of Sorrows who watched her with inscrutable dark eyes, something forgotten ever since those days when as a child she placed her offerings of flowers before the picture? Ah, if she could but sleep, she would no doubt awake calm, self-possessed, the mistress of her soul. But she could not sleep. Billows of flame ran across her mind; her thoughts flared out like a conflagration. They lit up every little detail of her life, and she had a horrible conviction that nothing was really forgotten, that on the delicate palimpsest of the brain every insignificant act and word was written indelibly. O, for sleep! O, to quench, if even for a moment, that torturing conflagration of the mind!

She rose silently, opened a drawer, and took from it a small hypodermic syringe. She had rarely used it, but she knew its use. She smiled a little bitterly as she drew it from its case. Was this being mistress of herself? But she was past caring for her own self-scorn. One tyrannous desire absorbed her—the desire of sleep, the desire to postpone, even for an instant, the violence of pain that grew

upon her. She dropped the tiny tabloid in the water, adjusted the slender needle, and injected the morphia. Then she lay back upon her pillows, her hands folded, breathing slowly and regularly. A soft wave of rest flowed over her; it was like liquid velvet. A second and a third wave followed. The lights in her mind grew dim. They became faint embers, burning along a vast line of sea. They went out one by one, and she heard the wash of waves along an unseen shore. She was being rocked to sleep by these friendly waves.

She woke reluctantly, and the cold grey dawn filled the room. She had lost all sense of time and place. Two persons stood beside her, her mother and the doctor. They spoke in low voices, and thought she did not hear. But she did, though she gave no sign. She did not want these two persons. She wished that they would go away. Their whispering irritated her. There was some one she did want, but she could not think of his name. She made a great effort to recollect that name; it was like diving in a deep sea for a pearl she could not find, and she felt breathless with the effort. Then it came to her quite suddenly, as though a star had silently fallen into the dark water and illumined it. "I want Francis," she said. Having said it, she sank back again into contented silence, and the slow waves flowed over her.

She was far from shore now, in a spacious solitude of water; and she began to be afraid. It was the infinite loneliness that dismayed her. Shadows lay upon the sea, and they grew deeper. Then a tiny boat of silver, like a crescent moon, floated toward her. Standing erect in it was the Woman of Sorrows, with the little Child in her arms, and light seemed to flow from her raiment. She held the Child to her bosom with one arm; the other she stretched out towards her.

"Come with me," she said. "I can save you."

At first she did not want to go with the Woman. She only wanted to be let alone. But as she watched the shadows deepening yet more and more upon the sea, her fear increased—fear of that infinite loneliness and silence. She stepped lightly into the frail boat. It seemed built of thinnest pearl. The water bubbled round its rim, and began to overflow it.

"Have faith," said the Woman.

But the water overflowed more and more, and the boat began to sink.

"What is that which thou hidest in thy bosom?" said the Woman.

"It is myself," she answered.

"That is why the boat sinks. Thou must cast thyself away. This is faith, to cast thyself away."

But she clung yet the closer to that which lay

within her bosom. Herself—that was all she had; how could she cast it away? It was her one treasure. Yet she knew that it was very heavy.

“Listen,” said the Woman. “That which thou hidest in thy bosom has never brought thee joy. Therefore cast it from thee, and, once released from its burden, thou shalt walk upon the waters. I promise it.”

She was moved for a moment, and put her hand within her bosom to pluck forth the thing that was her peril. She could feel it there distinctly; something hard, and cold, and very heavy. But the moment she tried to pluck it forth it became a thing alive that struggled and resisted. It was like plucking out her heart, and the pain was terrible.

“I cannot do it,” she said.

“Try,” said the Woman.

“Why should I?” she answered angrily. “It has always been there. I have grown up with it. I am used to it.”

“Then thou wilt sink,” said the Woman.

Indeed, as she spoke, the waters overflowed yet more. They washed her feet, they rose to her knees.

“Hast thou no faith?” cried the Woman, in a voice of agonised entreaty.

“None,” she replied. “I never had it. It is too late now.”

And even while she spoke the boat seemed to

dissolve, as light dissolves upon the sea when a cloud covers the moon, and she sank slowly into the dark waves. But the Woman and the Child remained, miraculously buoyed up upon the water. They glided from her, till the light within the Woman's raiment was but as a star in the distance. It was the last thing she saw as the waters overwhelmed her, and she began to sob, because the sea was so lonely now that the Woman had gone. She awoke sobbing.

It was midnight. A shaded light burned upon the mantel-shelf beneath the picture; the rest of the room was dark. The two figures she had disliked were gone, but some one else was there. He stood beside the mantel, his head bowed upon his hands. The room was silent, but for the faint crackle of the wood-fire upon the hearth, and she could hear his breath as it came and went. There was the suggestion of great grief and loneliness in his attitude. He appeared to be praying silently, and once in his prayer he spoke aloud. It was to utter her name. Then she knew him, and in a faint voice said, "Francis!"

He was by her side in a moment. His lips were upon her forehead, her hand in his. How cool and strong that hand of his felt; how good it was to feel its gentle pressure. She would not sink now.

She turned to him gratefully.

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"Kiss me again, dear," she said. "No, not the forehead, the lips."

She lay silent for a long time after that.

Then she said: "Kneel down, dear, so that I may reach you. I want to talk to you."

He knelt down, and she laid her hand upon his head, and smoothed back the heavy hair.

"I was wrong to leave you," she said. "But you have come back. That was like you, dear."

"We must not part again," he said, in a low voice, broken by sobs.

But she knew better. The frail hand that moved so softly on his head was even now engaged in a mute farewell.

"You will soon be well," he said.

"No," she answered, in a whisper, "I am going away, this time for good. It is well that you should know it. I am sorry, so sorry, dear."

"No, no, it cannot be!" he cried.

"Yes," she said.

He received the blow in silence. But his eyes were startled and full of anguish.

"Listen!" she said. "I want to tell you something. You and I, dear, may never meet again."

"Yes, in the Hereafter—surely there!" he cried.

"I don't know," she said sadly, "and I can't pretend. You wouldn't wish me to do that; would you, dear?"

"No," he whispered.

"Well, listen then. If I am without hope, remember that I am also without fear. I am content to go by the road which all have travelled or must travel. Whether there is anything at the end of the road I do not know. Sometimes I think so . . . more often it is quite dark. But I am content to have lived . . . to have known you, dear, to have loved you. That is much, far more than I had the right to ask."

"O, my darling, if I could but give you faith," he murmured.

"But you cannot," she said wistfully. "No man can save his brother's soul. Some have faith, some have it not. I am one of those who have not. God won't be hard on me for that, will He, dear?"

"No, no. He will understand."

"Yes, He will understand," she repeated. "You do; He must. And that is why I am not afraid."

He came nearer, and laid her head upon his shoulder. All the sweetness of the first days of their married love came back to him in that moment; and she, realising the same memories, put her frail arm about his neck.

"You must not grieve," she whispered.

She made an effort to wipe away the tears from his face, and at this act of tenderness he broke out in an exceeding bitter cry.

"O, if you had but faith!" he cried. "Perhaps it will come yet—before the"—he could not speak the word "end." "But don't think that I am afraid for you, dear. Only if some light shines, if at the end of the road you see anything, give me a sign, dear. It will make no difference to you . . . God will never blame you for being honest. But if He gives you some light, let me know, dear. It will make all the difference to me, when I think of you in all the lonely years that are to come."

"I will let you know; . . . if I cannot speak, I will raise my hand. Will that do, dear? Now let me sleep, I am very tired."

The light died out of her eyes as she spoke. The arm around his neck relaxed its intimate caress.

Another day passed, and she still lay unconscious. O, dreadful hours, when that which was so full of eager life, whose will contended with our own it may be, whose secret hopes and fears we so little understood, nor sought to know, lies inanimate—nothing left us but the silent body, from whose lips no word comes, from whose eyes no recognition shines, perhaps in whose heart our very image is effaced. O, dreadful hours, when we would give a year of life for one brief word or glance; when this which was so common, that we disregarded it or held it lightly, has suddenly ac-

quired a value wholly inestimable, because it is denied us, and forevermore. And, still more terrible, the thought that this soul we loved is passing out upon a dim and perilous way we cannot tread, unaccompanied, fearful, and solitary, and that the words which might have cheered it now must be unspoken, or, if spoken, be in vain.

Would she give the sign? All the anguish of West's heart gathered itself in that question.

It could not greatly matter, he told himself. She was, after all, what life had made her, and last moments could not alter years. And she had been indomitably honest—honest when she left him; and God would take just account of that. But it was less of her than of himself that he was thinking when he asked the sign. He saw that now. He had shaped her life. If her own life had not altered when his altered, it was not her fault; but the weight and responsibility of all those previous years lay heavy upon him. And he saw, too, how sorely tempted she must have been to speak the word of faith for his sake. It would have been so easy that she must have wished to do it. But she did not; and there was something heroic in her honesty, in this clinging of the brave tortured soul to its own integrity. God would remember that. And it came to him with a flood of tenderness that Christ said no hard word even to the man

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who refused to believe unless he thrust his hand into the side. No doubt the other disciples, who had had their sign, jeered at Thomas because he refused all hearsay evidence; but Jesus saw the heroic in his doubt, and gave him all he asked for. That was so like Jesus, never to ask too much of human nature, always to be tender to its very frailties, because He knew how close the frailty lay to the heroism and the faith.

The long night wore itself away. Once more the cold, pure dawn flowed into the silent room.

The end had come. The breathing sank lower, and was like a child's.

Then she opened her eyes. The last dying light of recognition fluttered in them for a moment, and slowly faded.

He stooped over her pale lips.

"I am not afraid," she whispered.

Was that all? He waited breathlessly. Was there no light along the dark road?

Another moment passed. She lay with her hands open, helpless, straight beside her.

Suddenly the fingers of the right hand moved. She lifted the hand slowly, once, thrice.

A faint smile relaxed the lips. It was like the last ray of pale sunlight upon snow. It died away, and all was dark.

XVIII

THE NEW WORLD IS BORN

WEST was in the quiet house in New York again, quiet and empty now. His grief was great, but under it, as beneath the waves of a troubled sea, there lay a profound abyss of peace. Peace in the thought that all was well with Helen; that at the last she had not been without light on the dark road; she had given the sign. He wondered much what that sign meant, what it was the passing soul saw in that final moment; but he was sure that the smile which lay upon her dead face was the expression of a great happiness.

In a way wholly mystical, and therefore inexpressible in the ordinary symbols of language, he felt himself a sharer in that happiness. Wherever she was or whatever she saw, she was now nearer to him than she had ever been. She would no longer misjudge him, and he was incapable of misjudging her. When they met again it would be in the light of perfect knowledge.

So he took up the work of life again, not in a spirit of dull stoicism, but in a mood that might be best described as one of chastened elation. He

must work while it was called to-day, and ah, how much there was to do! For every hour brought fresh proof that the foundations of society were loosened. As he had said in his memorable discussion with the Cardinal, fear lay upon the earth, and was producing everywhere moral stupefaction. Yet he knew that this was but the darkness before the dawn. Something new must emerge; the world was not ending, it was only beginning. When the dawn came, it would make all things new. More and more he set his face toward that inevitable Dawn.

But in the meantime the darkness only seemed to deepen. The general cessation of business had produced enormous poverty. Hordes of workless men marched through every city, demanding restitution for their wrongs. They carried blood-red banners and sang the Marseillaise as they marched. Simultaneously there sprang up in every city Socialistic tribunals, proclaiming social revolution. The authorities dared not interfere. It was rumoured that they themselves had been bought by the Socialists. The rumour was believed, and the result was a reign of terror in New York. The rich fled to their country estates; their mansions on Fifth Avenue were barricaded; yet there was no actual violence or bloodshed; even those who had most come to hate the Socialists, acknowledged that they acted with great restraint and wisdom.

The fact was that, while the Church did not know what to do, the Socialists took advantage of the situation, and did much that the Church should have done long before. They proclaimed the reign of universal justice. They affirmed the social ideas of Jesus as their own. But with equal emphasis they scorned His religious ideals. They had been tried, they said, and had failed. They had produced only selfish individualism by centring all human thought upon the salvation of the personal soul. All the wrong of the world could be traced to that cause. But the social ideas of Jesus had never been tried. None of these so-called Christians had paid the least regard to these social teachings. Who of them gave to him that had need, not expecting to receive again? Who was truly indifferent to wealth? Who, when he made a feast, preferred the company of those who could not recompense him? Who realised that the only true life was that which ministered and was not ministered unto? Who lived as though he truly believed that a man's life consisted not in the abundance of things which he possessed? Scarcely any one. The Church had for ages been notoriously upon the side of wealth, and even predatory wealth. Whether Jesus had come again, or would come, or could come, was a matter of indifference to them; but if He did, He would surely approve their action, for they

were really engaged in applying His ideals to a society which had never tried them.

This plea was too plausible and pertinent to be ignored. But West knew perfectly that the social ideas of Jesus were based upon His religious ideas, and that the one without the other must prove impracticable. He acknowledged that the Church, by directing all her energy to the salvation of the individual soul, had undoubtedly created that spirit of other-worldliness, which regarded all questions of wide social betterment as secondary and even negligible. But was it not also clear that, without the conviction of the value of the personal soul, there could be no true impulse to social endeavour? Withdraw the sanction of the world to come, and human life appeared so meagre a thing that the temptation was irresistible to live selfishly. "Eat, drink, be merry, to-morrow we die;" it was the only sensible philosophy for those who held that death ended all. No; the world could avoid anarchy only by means of the religious ideas of Jesus. And there lay the hope of the Church—that new Church which he saw slowly rising out of the abyss of the general confusion. "First, that which is spiritual; then, that which is natural," he said, thus reversing the Apostolic word. A Church, newly, vehemently awake to the reality of the spiritual, would soon begin to act on social conditions with

new power. And so he set himself more and more to organise such a Church. It was to be the Church of the New Life. It would achieve social justice because it was sure of its spiritual sanctions. It would simplify the whole system of life. Socialism could not do this, because its underlying principle was greed of happiness. The Church of the New Life could do it, because its master-principle was the greed of Good.

He pondered these thoughts much in his lonely house; night after night found him thinking, praying. And strange as it may seem, Payson Hume helped him greatly toward clearness of definition.

The big florid man was now his most frequent visitor. He usually came late at night, after a long day spent in toils among the poor. He was busily engaged in investing all his money in the stock of Human Kindness, and it was clear that he was drawing vast dividends of personal happiness. The whole man was changed. The eyes no longer glanced craftily from beneath veiled lids; they were frank, open, filled with light. His jovial manner was softened into something much rarer, geniality. He was so manifestly glad-hearted, so jubilant, that his very presence kindled joy.

"What have you done to-day?"

And then he would tell West, always ending with a tribute of gratitude to Mercy Lane.

"That woman is an angel," he would say.

For he loved her: he made no disguise of that. There were many moments when he longed to tell her so, to ask her to marry him; but he dared not speak. To him she was a sacred creature, of whom he was entirely unworthy. He was content to walk beside her, to touch her raiment with a furtive hand, to treasure her words and glances. He found an exquisite delight in these things, which thoughts of human passion only disturbed and dissipated. It was as though a crystal screen rose between him and her; she was a creature apart. He would never reach her; she would remain forever unattainable; yet there was more of delight than disappointment in the thought—

*She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair.*

"She is an angel"—that was his joy, at times his torture—yet a blissful torture. He was never tired of talking of her to West, but to others he said nothing.

"She goes into a room full of misery and squalor," he would say, "and it is as if the sunlight came in with her. She lays her pure hands upon crying children, and they fall asleep; upon peevish, miserable, diseased creatures, and they answer her with smiles. She seems to bring peace and purification with her into the meanest room.

She will kneel beside a dying woman, and say nothing—only pray silently,—and the moaning ceases, the restless hands lie quiet. Oh, it is wonderful! If I could only be a little more like her . . . but she is an angel.” And tears shone in his eyes as he spoke.

One night he came to West with a great scheme. The snow once more lay upon the city, the cold was extreme, Christmas was near. And the poverty was dreadful. The strong man wept as he described it. The people were starving silently, heroically. The Socialistic tribunals had failed to bring them practical relief. They were too busy with their ideals for reform, and, while they debated, people died. And the Church did even less—not from intention, but purely through lack of adequate organisation.

“And the great Charities, what of them?” said West.

“They are bound hand and foot in the red tape of routine. They must enquire, and enquire, and enquire, before they will help, and, while they make their elaborate diagnosis, the patient dies. One of their agents met Mercy Lane to-day beside a wretched pile of rags on which a man—a workingman—lay dying. Do you know what he said?”

“I can guess,” said West.

“Yes, you know the sort of man, no doubt. A little dapper, neatly-dressed elderly man working on a salary, drawn from the revenues of charity.

He told her that indiscriminate relief of the poor was criminal. He grew quite hot and angry over it."

"And what did she say?"

"She replied, in that beautiful calm way of hers, that Christ told us not to give only to the deserving poor, but just to the poor anyway—to him that had need. And she asked him if Christ enquired into the character of the dying thief before He blessed him, or if the good Samaritan waited for a certificate of good conduct from the wounded traveller before he bound up his wounds?"

"And the man, what did he say?"

"He evaporated," said Hume. "Slunk away. Couldn't lift his head up to her sweet eyes. I don't suppose he was a bad man either—only, you see, he had never starved. I used to give money, too, to the society that paid that man his salary," he added regretfully.

"And you don't now?"

"Not I. I've learned better. But that brings me to my point, to the scheme I want you to help me in."

It was not a novel scheme, but it was certainly conceived upon a scale that no one else had attempted. He had hired Pat Maloney's dance-hall—it would seat four thousand persons,—and in it he proposed to give a great supper to the poor. It was to be like Christ's great supper in the parable; it was for the people of the highways and the

hedges. There would be no discrimination. There would be no tickets. Let all come who would; on Christmas Eve the doors should stand wide to the world, the one credential should be poverty. Mercy Lane should preside. She should give the food to the poor. It would be the greatest joy in life for her, and she had earned that joy.

"As for the money," he concluded, "we need not discuss that. That is my affair. I've been finding out for a long time, thanks to Mercy Lane, that the only real pleasure money can give you is the pleasure of giving it away."

West's heart glowed at the words. He remembered what Payson Hume had been, and marvelled at the change. And in that change he found the confirmation of his hopes for the New Church. It was the conviction of a Christ in the world, living and regnant, which had changed Hume from an unscrupulous financial huckster into a man, tender-hearted, self-forgetful, laboriously charitable; here was the great dynamic of all social reform.

He listened eagerly to Hume's enthusiastic plans, and approved them. What more Christian work could be imagined than this feeding of the multitude? It was the work which Christ Himself so often did; the happiest hours in all the Master's life were surely these, when grateful multitudes sat upon the green grass in companies, and ate the

bread which He had blessed, while He moved from group to group, animating each in turn with a new spirit of hope and happiness. Strange how such acts had been forgotten, or tacitly ignored! Ah, this was the eternal irony of Christianity—doctrines remembered, charity forgotten, in spite of Christ's own solemn declaration that to feed the hungry and clothe the naked counted for far more with God than all vain orthodoxies of belief and worship.

So the scheme was settled, and even Pat Maloney approved it: for ever since the night of the saturnalia Maloney had been an altered man. He also had seen the strange Man standing at the door, sad and reproachful, on that memorable night; and he had heard next day the story of how the same Man had appeared in the cold dawn to the outcasts in the cellar. The story had lost nothing in the telling. It had put on the wonder and the mystery of a legend. And deep down in the gross nature of Pat Maloney a fibre of superstition stirred, and he was afraid. He remembered with horror how he had carried the banner with the reversed Cross. He caught eagerly at the idea that there might be some element of atonement for his sacrilege in this scheme of a Christmas Eve dinner to the hungry. He refused to take his hire of the dance-hall: no, he would give the hall without price,—perhaps God would put that one good act to his credit, and not

be too hard upon him for the hundred evil acts which he remembered with remorse. Poor fellow, he had the crudest notions of religion; they consisted almost wholly of a lively dread of that purgatory which had been painted on his mind in childhood in a hundred lurid flame-pictures; but his good angel surely smiled on him when he said to Hume: "No, sir, I'll not take a continental. You're welcome to the hall, and may all the holy saints bless you, sir, for your good thought."

"What do you think of that?" said Hume, as he reported Pat Maloney's conduct to West.

"I think," said West, "that our New Church has got another member."

"Yes," Hume replied, with a thoughtfulness unusual with him; "we all know the vices of the virtuous, but I begin to see that there are virtues in the vicious."

And so at last Christmas Eve came; biting cold, with a sky of blue ice, and a wind blowing straight from the Arctic.

West awoke very early, conscious of a strange commotion in his thought. A dream within a dream had visited him, wholly indefinable, yet eminently joyous. He tried in vain to grasp its elusive clues.

There was a sense of elation, of relief; of something fulfilled; of the march of dim hosts, lost in the dust of distance, of some tremendous battle

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won, and of trumpets blowing from secret towers, and of a new time at hand. There had been some decisive conflict and defeat, some immeasurable conquest, but what he could not tell. Only it seemed as though all his life had waited for this hour; all the world had waited for it, too; it was the consummating hour of Time itself, and it was the trampling of the Ages that he heard as they withdrew, the proclamation of some new birth of Time which echoed from those unseen trumpets.

And then he remembered that to-morrow was Christmas, when He had come who changed all the courses of time; ah, that He might come again!

He dressed rapidly, and went immediately to Pat Maloney's dance-hall.

Already the crowd had gathered. And such a crowd; people of all nationalities, but alike in their patient wretchedness; old men who had knocked too late at the door of opportunity, gaunt and silent; mothers with children in their arms; young girls, wan with hunger; mere lads, with the faces of mature men; broken clerks and out-of-works, the mere refuse of the great industrial system which makes one millionaire and a thousand drudges; a Pentecost of the Poor, speaking in many tongues, gathered from every land, with the pale flame of hunger seated on each brow, and the one dream in all those eyes the dream of bread. Thousands of them,

like a grey sea, whose waves are full of eyes! Thousands who asked but one thing of the world, the mere right to live! And then the door of the dance-hall slowly rolled back, and the great march past of the disinherited began. Pat Maloney stood at the door, the guardian of order. His face was radiant. And as the crowd passed him, cries of pleasure and astonishment were heard. For the vast hall was transformed into a forest of Christmas verdure, and the distant platform was a bank of costly roses. Behind that barrier of roses stood a solitary woman, Mercy Lane. Pale and sweet and silent she stood there, the very Angel of a Christmas Pity.

And then the long march past! The crowd became a sinuous file, moving slowly toward the woman who smiled behind the roses. Hours passed; the file seemed interminable. To each, as he came, she handed a full supply of food, enough for more than the feast of a single day. And to each she spoke some kind and gentle word, and that was for many the best gift of all. A woman kissed her hand; and then, as though a law had been promulgated silently, the example became general.

"You see, I know her," said the woman, as she moved away. "She nursed my man when he was dying."

It was an enviable distinction. She had known Mercy Lane.

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Some of the women even kissed the hem of her garment. She blushed, and would have withdrawn from their fond eagerness of love.

"Was ever woman so loved?" thought Hume, as he watched the scene with tears.

"You must not thank me," she said. "Thank him. He did it all."

And then it was Hume's turn to withdraw.

"Can't I help you, miss?" said Pat Maloney. "You'll be tired out. There are thousands more of 'em."

"No: I could never tire of this work," she replied, with a smile. "And, besides, they seem to like me to give them their portions."

"Ah, it's because you give yourself with them, miss. May the holy saints bless you for it this day."

But as the afternoon wore on, weariness grew upon her, and she was obliged to sit. Still she spoke to each, the briefest word sometimes, and still they kissed her hand.

It was five o'clock; the work was not half-done. Outside the air was darkened, and a great tempest had begun to rage across the city.

Something had gone wrong with the electric light. The hall, which should have blazed with radiance, was in semi-darkness. A large oil-lamp, suddenly improvised, shone above the platform, illuminating the pale, tired face of Mercy Lane; it

was the only light in that great space, and it emphasised the gloom. The thronging faces showed pale in that immensity of shadow. The wind threshed along the roof of the hall, a peal of thunder shook the building, and a flash of lightning, like the swift thrust of a flaming sword, cut across the darkness.

The crowd showed symptoms of alarm. Mercy Lane rose, and, standing in the light of the lamp, began to speak. She had a beautiful voice, clear and deep, full of exquisite vibrations, a voice which had a curious and quite unusual power of touching the emotions.

"Do not be alarmed," she said. "There is no cause for fear."

And then she became aware, all at once, of some one who stood beside her on the platform; a tall Man, dressed in dark flowing raiment, with dark hair falling on His shoulders, and a pale face with intense sad eyes.

He looked round him silently, and the crowd surged closer to the platform, drawn by the glance of those intense sad eyes. And, as they watched, it seemed the sadness disappeared; a slow smile grew like a gradual dawn upon His face, and a faint answering light of confidence appeared upon the faces of the crowd. It was as though a great happiness had come to each, they knew not how nor why.

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He spoke at last, and if Mercy Lane's voice was sweet, His was infinitely sweeter. It was like nothing human, so soft, so exquisitely gentle was it. Love breathed in it, pity, infinite compassion, and a power not less infinite; it was a winged voice that entered into the secret places of each heart; and at its sound the doors of all hearts flew open.

"Pat Maloney, come here."

The big bartender stood open-mouthed and trembling.

"Come!" said the Man.

He came slowly, and fell upon his knees at the Stranger's feet.

"You have been an evil man. You have done much wrong. Is it not so?"

"Yes, Sir," sobbed Maloney.

"But on this day you have done well, and for the sake of this day all the others are forgiven. For on this day you have had compassion on the poor, and from this day you shall unwind the snare of past evil, thread by thread. And men shall love you—you whom they hated."

His hand rested on Maloney's bowed head, and, with it still resting there, He turned to the crowd and said: "Comrades, listen. A Man came to earth long ago, upon this very night. He was born poor and lowly, He lived among the poor and lowly all His life. He did this by choice, because He loved

them, and because He wished to teach others how to love them. Some men learned the lesson—a few; many rejected it and Him; so those who rejected Him at last slew Him, and He died. But He died knowing that the truth He taught could never be forgotten wholly. It has not been forgotten, though many centuries of crime and guilt have swept across the world. The time has come when that lesson must be learned anew. The world is tired of wrong and of injustice. It is tired of a selfish way of life which profits no one. But from this hour a new world is born. Henceforth, justice shall reign where wrong has triumphed. Henceforth, each shall share the bounties of the earth with all, and know that it is more blessed to give than to receive. For the Man they slew could not die, because He was the Truth, and truth can never die. You know His name. Not one of you who has not thought with tenderness of the Babe born to-night among those far-off hills of Bethlehem. You know how He lived. Follow Him. This is the secret of life. Behold the world of wrong and of unkindness ends to-night. A new world is born, and love is justified.”

He stood gazing into the faces of the crowd.

“I go away, but not for long,” He said. “Think of Me often; I shall hear your thought. Build up the new world, and it may be your hands shall meet

Mine as you toil. There are those who shall teach you how."

"Master!" said Mercy Lane.

She knelt at His feet beside Pat Maloney. He touched her bowed head with an infinite gentleness, and so He stood a moment, between her and the penitent saloon-keeper, a hand upon the head of each.

The crowd watched in silence; then, as by a common instinct, they also knelt.

His face grew transfigured.

"The New World is born," He said. "It is born, as all things are born, in anguish. But be not afraid. Sorrow may endure for a night, but Joy cometh in the Morning."

And then an awful wave of motion ran along the solid ground. It was as though a sea moved beneath their feet. The vast hall, with all its multitude of men and women, swung slowly to and fro.

The storm had ceased. Out of a clear heaven the moon shone forth, and the pale light filled the hall, washing with its wave of silver all those awe-stricken faces. Mercy Lane, still kneeling, said, "Master, Master!" But He was gone.

Outside the hall wild cries and the noise of trampling feet were heard. The earthquake had smitten the city. But within the hall, there was awe, but not alarm; there a Voice had spoken, which long ago the winds and the seas obeyed.

XIX

THE FALLEN CHURCH

THE earthquake had come! It had been long predicted, but the prophet of disaster finds no disciples in the times of peace. Such a fate might happen to a San Francisco, itself a bubble of strange exotic life arisen from the sea, but to a New York, the city impregnable, built upon the solid rock, this was impossible! New York, the final expression of man's Titanic power; this city of heaven-daring towers, bastioned in solid might against the firmament, whose foundations were interlocked with root of steel to the fibres of the living rock; this city veined with fire kindled by the hands of man, topped with proud flame, flaring like a torch across the seas; this city to which all nations brought their tribute, at whose feet the commerce of the world was gathered, from whose wharves ran the sentient filaments along which the anxieties and hopes of all the earth throbbed and flashed—it was a thing monstrous and incredible that in a single hour the breath of Ruin should have made it one with Nineveh and Tyre; yet

so it was. The impregnable city had fallen like a house of cards shaken by a careless finger. Alas! for "the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearl. For in one hour so great riches is made desolate. And every ship-master, and any one that saileth any whither, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like the great city? And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, wherein all that had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her costliness, for in one hour is she made desolate!"

When the awed crowd passed out of Pat Maloney's dance-hall, they stepped into an unknown world. An immense cloud of dust lay like a black fog above the city. The street lights were extinguished. Deep fissures ran across the streets. The wharves were on fire, and in a few moments the dust-cloud was as red as blood. And then, in that awful light, the full dimensions of the great catastrophe became apparent. Of many a proud building, all that was left was a single toppling wall. Mountains of ruin lay across the streets. Over these monstrous barricades men and women swarmed in aimless flight. "The fire!" they

cried, and fled. They left the wounded where they lay; the city was like a battlefield in the moment of defeat and flight.

The whole city must have perished, had not the sea risen in a great tidal wave, and extinguished the burning wharves. It was a night of terror such as earth had rarely known. But to these men and women, coming from the dance-hall, the sense of terror was lost in solemn wonder. For, while a thousand churches were destroyed, the dance-hall remained uninjured. The lamp still burned steadily above the platform with its bank of roses. And still the air seemed to vibrate with the tones of that Voice which had proclaimed the birth of a New World, that Voice at once so daring and so tranquil.

The dance-hall was instantly transformed into a hospital.

"He said the New World would be born in anguish," sighed Mercy Lane.

As the wounded were brought in one by one, she received them. Among the first was the poor out-cast woman, the Magdalene of the Cellar. She was visibly dying, but quite conscious. Within her arms she held a little child.

"He ain't hurt, is he?" said the dying woman.

"No, he is asleep. The child is unhurt."

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"I got it good and hard, didn't I? But I don't care, if the child's all right."

"Let me take the child," said Mercy.

"No, not till I'm gone. He's all I have to love. I never had a child of my own."

Mercy kissed the woman's lips, and smoothed the tangled hair.

"No one has done that to me since I was a little girl," she said. "You're a good woman, ain't you?"

"I have tried to be," said Mercy softly.

"Yet you kissed me. And I'm a bad woman. Why did you do it?"

"Because I love you."

She lay silent some moments, meditating that reply.

"Read me something, will you? Something about Him who gave me the child."

Mercy knelt beside her, and began to read the immortal story of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. When she finished, the woman said: "Do you think if I kissed His feet He'd forgive me? She was a woman like me, wasn't she?"

"Yes, like you."

"But I wouldn't like to wipe His feet with my hair, it ain't fit."

Her eyes wandered towards the end of the room

where the lamp still burned above the bank of flowers.

"Them's roses, ain't they? There used to be roses in my mother's garden, I remember. I'd like to wipe His feet with roses. My hair ain't fit."

Mercy brought a great bunch of roses and laid them by the woman's shoulder.

She turned her face towards them, and said: "My, ain't they sweet. They kind of make me feel like I was home again."

She spoke only once after that.

"I saw the beam falling," she said, "and I couldn't get away. It hurt me dreadful, but it didn't hurt the child. I took care it shouldn't. I hope Him as gave me the child will be pleased at that."

"Who was it gave you the child?" said Mercy.

"I guess it was Him what you read about. Him whose feet I'd like to kiss."

"Jesus?" said Mercy, in a whisper.

"Yes. That's Him.

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild
Look upon a little child,
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee."

It was no doubt the prayer she had learned long years ago as a child at her mother's knee. In it she

took her farewell of life. A moment later Mercy drew the sleeping child from her rigid arms.

The dawn was breaking. The immense cloud of dust was rolling far out to sea. A faint wash of purple diffused itself in the bank of haze; it thinned into rippling gold, and then the sun arose. An infinite tranquillity lay on the sea.

Men wept for joy to welcome the familiar light. They had never thought to see the sun again. They stood with haggard faces, silent, watching the gradual unfolding of the day. The world still existed, and it seemed incredible. They gazed around them, wondering and grateful. And then from one ruined belfry—all that was left of a great church—a bell began to clang joyously, and men remembered it was Christmas Day.

Christmas Day, when long ago the world's Hope was born; and what had this day brought? It had come not with choiring hosts of angels; but with Angels of Destruction, whose wings were black, and from whose bosom dropped a rain of fire upon the earth. And He had come, too; men knew it now. All the prognostications of the ages were fulfilled; all those many agitations of the previous months were explained. And, as men stood amid the ruins, they began to understand the meaning of these things. They knew that in a single night the old world had passed away. They must build

anew, another better world. All things had been shaken that that which could not be shaken should remain.

Gradually one fact, significant and strange, took possession of men's minds—the Church was gone! Of all these many buildings sacred to religion, scarcely one stone was left upon another. Some were mere heaps of ruin; others had vast fissures in their walls; and the voice of singing men and singing women would be heard in them no more. But Pat Maloney's dance-hall remained uninjured, immune amid the general downfall. And it was there that He had last been seen; there, where the hungry had been fed, the poor consoled, and where even now Mercy Lane still moved amid the injured with healing in her touch!

Surely it was a parable, full of suggestion for the future! West read it clearly. Was not this dance-hall, with its manifest piety of love and helpfulness, the very type of that New Church of which he had dreamed? Was not this its microcosm?

The best had always seen it, but afar off, as an unrealised ideal. Between them and it arose formidable barriers, which none but the most daring spirits of humanity had found the strength to challenge. The others had reluctantly submitted to traditions which they could not break. Yet each knew, all the best men knew, that the Church, as it ex-

isted, had become the mausoleum of the Christ-idea, not the organ of its true expression. Like the ancient Pharisees this Church had tithed their mint and annin, but had forgotten mercy and the love of God. It had worshipped; it had not worked. It had manufactured sentiment; it had not served. Yet, as if to prove that amid all its long apostasies something imperishable subsisted at its root, that root had never failed from time to time to cast up new flowers of fairest life. It had produced a Mercy Lane, and thousands like her. And in her West saw the perfect type of that which was to be. She was the Priestess of the future, her character the final synthesis of all religion.

In crises of supreme emotion thought is swift; it seemed to West that his whole life passed before him in those few moments while he stood in the doorway of the dance-hall, watching the dawn rise upon the ruined city. He saw it not in its events, but in its underlying principles. He saw that he was by instinct one of those who stood aloof from the gross realities of life. He had been a looker-on. It was because he had been a looker-on that his first desires had been toward the world of art. He wanted not to engage himself in the storm of action, but to watch it, to describe it, to catch its passing gloom and grandeur. His love of literature was but a working out of the same spirit.

Here was a world within the world, securely guarded, from whose high battlements he could look out upon the movements of ordinary men with a species of benign commiseration. He had had no desire to share those movements. To watch them from afar, to criticise and at times to analyse them, to gratify his artistic sense by the perception of their passing tragedy or pathos—that was the limit of his purpose. He had recalled to himself the lives of poets and of artists, those detached and infinitely desirable existences, which were passed in long dreams of harmony and colour, and he had been proud to call himself of their company. To be a looker-on, to see all things like a pageant, to behold but not to share the common human strife, that had seemed to him the wisest use of life.

He had entered the ministry of the Christian Church, but still as a looker-on. Here, also, was a world within the world, securely guarded; a life of shelter and detachment. Born seven centuries earlier he would have dwelt within the high walls of a monastery, a scholar in a great library, a student in a quiet cell with a window opening upon a garden, inhaling with the flowers the subtle perfume of religion, exhilarated by the colour and the fairness of those forms of ceremonial through which the poetry of faith became vocal, delicately

tangible. In effect he had really lived such a life. He had moved amid pleasant people and pursuits; he had followed the bent of inclination; his life had been immaculately cloistral. Of the real nature of human life he had known nothing. And, again, he had not wished to know anything. The immense conflicts of men in the war of greed and of ambition, the enormous cruelties they inflicted on each other in this war, the agony, the despair, the fierce valour of this trampling host—in all this he had had no real interest; it had seemed to him sordid and vulgar; it was at most a spectacle to be watched with varying degrees of pity and astonishment. It had not disturbed his calm. He had never felt the least desire to plunge into the mad strife, to take his part, to do what was in him to turn the tide of battle to some better social purpose. No; in religion also he had been a looker-on.

And he saw further that in all this he had been but a type of many men, a type of the Church itself. For the Church also had been a looker-on. Its ministers had too often stood aloof from the sordid realities of life. They could scarcely avoid such a spirit, for everything in their position and environment developed it. Was it not their boast that they were separated men, living separated lives? It was nothing to the purpose to reply that in these separated lives much of personal goodness

was developed; the same thing might have been said of hundreds of cloistral lives which spent themselves within the walls of monasteries, in the ages when the world was most corrupt. But Christ's was not a separated life. He moved freely among the people, ate and drank with publicans and sinners, touched real life at all points, suffered all that common men endured, all their poverty and toil, all their disabilities and unmerited indignities, and thus was one with them. That was where His power lay; He was not a looker-on, He was one with men.

That was where the Church had failed, it had lost the democratic spirit. It had produced for its service a specialised kind of man, bred in colleges and seminaries, the exponent of thoughts and views, but out of touch with common life. It had practically forbidden these men that knowledge of common life which comes through the comradeship of toil, the strife of politics, the knowledge at first hand of inferior social conditions. The result was everywhere apparent. To ordinary men the minister appeared one who stood upon a remote height, uttering messages which were devoid of practical and human interest. The Church had regarded the great causes of common human justice as negligible; in turn the world had gone upon its way, asking no guidance of the Church, and

treating it as a negligible factor in society. This is what came of being a looker-on.

And then, with a swift rebound, his thoughts dwelt on Mercy Lane. He gazed upon her with tear-filled eyes as she moved among the sufferers in the dance-hall, in her indefatigable pity, and saw how patient eyes followed her with tender trust, and how tortured lips kissed the very hem of her garment as she stooped above them. He remembered, too, how he had once regarded her: how her work had seemed much inferior to his, how he had paid little attention to her, how she had a hundred times entered his library to take the dole he gave her, and had gone upon her way, meek and silent, to engage herself in toils which he had not so much as wish to understand. And he saw now how immeasurably superior she was to him. She rose far above him, a woman the very latchet of whose shoes he was unworthy to unloose. And it was borne in upon him that, while he dreamed of a New Church, that Church had already been established by Mercy Lane. She had both seized and exemplified its meaning and its spirit. For she was not a looker-on. She did not philosophise about things, but acted on them by the living force of service and compassion. And surely the presence of that strange Master, who chose this dance-hall filled with the unfortunate as the scene of His

last appearance and final message to the world, was His visible approval of her character and work. It was as though He had said, "Henceforth, My temple is with the poor; here shall My Church be found, and they who love Me shall

Give themselves for the sake of others,
Themselves to their neighbours lending,
See their Lord in their suffering brothers,
And not in the clouds descending."

Yes; that was His Christmas message to mankind. The Church had fallen, but only that Church which man had built; in the same instant the New Church had risen which was indestructible.

A spirit of great gladness filled his heart. All bitter thoughts departed from him; there remained only a sense of innermost tranquillity. That which had passed away had but made room for something better, and that solitary bell, ringing from the ruined belfry, proclaimed the Christmas message that once more God had visited His children, and that with the world it was forever and forever well.

He gazed once more into the dance-hall. The light of the solitary lamp was dimmed by the advancing dawn. Mercy Lane, tired out with the tragic night, sat against the bank of roses, her head bowed upon her arm, and upon her bosom lay a sleeping child. He bowed his head before

that picture. It was so, long ago, that a weary woman sat beneath the shadow of the Pyramids, with the Hope of the race within her arms, an indifferent or hostile world around her. Along the road passed the pomp of Rome and Egypt, soldiers shining in their gilded armour, prefects and tetrarchs robed in purple, little thinking that she would be remembered when they and all their glories had crumbled into dust. She, in her adorable divine meekness, had survived them all; they with brazen feet had marched into oblivion, they and the world of pride they represented, but in her heart-beats the future throbbed, and the Child within her arms was to prove the only abiding conqueror of men. Even so he saw Mercy Lane, and that which lay within her bosom was the Future of the World.

Down the street moved three men he knew, the Cardinal, Field, and Stockmar.

They approached him silently, each absorbed in awful meditation. The Cardinal was the first to speak.

"I have come to be of help," he said. "Where are the wounded?"

West pointed him to the rows of sufferers in the dance-hall.

"They are not without help," he said.

"Alas!" said the Cardinal. "I am deprived of

the proper means to render them the last offices of the Church. All is swept away—all."

"You bring yourself, that is enough," said West.

The Cardinal entered the hall. He was used to scenes of suffering. How often had he stood beside dying men, touching with the sacred oils the eyes that had looked too long on sin, the lips that had blasphemed, the hands that had taken hold so greedily on pleasure, while attending servitors of the Church swung the censer with its rising cloud of incense, as though they would perfume the bitter way of death. How often had he uttered over closing eyes that magnificent litany of the Church in which the agony of human spirits supplicates angels and archangels, saints and apostles, to befriend the solitary traveller passing into the unknown shadows of the final road. But to-day he stood alone beside the dying, unsupported by the solemn ceremonials of his Church. And, for the first time in his life, he realised that he did not need them. His quick gaze rested upon Mercy Lane, and he understood. Better than any oils of cleansing, any incense of upsoaring adoration, any litany of supplication, her smile, her gracious kindness, her gentle touch. Yes, he understood.

He turned to West, and said, "Do you remember how we talked of a New Church?"

"I remember."

"And I said, did I not, that even Rome must give up the Keys of Peter when Peter's Master came?"

"And He has come," said West.

"Yes, He has come," replied the Cardinal solemnly. "And the old has passed away, with its follies and its errors, its traditions and its ceremonies,—thank God, with its divisions too. The New Church has come: it has but one creed—charity; it has but one law of life, 'Little children, love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God. God is love.'"

He turned to the three men and said, with a smile, "I am priest enough still to want to catechise you, however. West, what did you call yourself in those old days? What was your denomination, I mean?"

"I was a Presbyterian," said West.

"And you, Field?"

"They called me an Agnostic."

"And you, Stockmar?"

"I was nothing. Just an outsider."

"And I," said the Cardinal, "was a Catholic. It seems a long time ago since such terms were possible. I think the papers used to speak of me as a great Churchman."

He uttered the words with gentle irony.

"I was sometimes proud of it, too," he added. "A Churchman," he went on. "How poor a name

that seems to-day. I think it has always been the symbol of hate, certainly of variance and division, for all the contests which have divided Christ's disciples have been over questions of churchmanship. But I have found a better word. It comes to me new-born out of the cradle of this Christmas morn. O, God, let the Churchman perish; make me by Thy grace, something infinitely higher, better, nobler—a Christ-man!"

"And I also," said West, "would be a Christ-man."

"And I," said Field and Stockmar.

The four men stood with bowed heads, saluting the new vision that came with the new word.

Then the Cardinal turned to Mercy Lane. She had heard their words. Her face, which West had once found deficient in beauty, was very lovely now; it seemed to him, in its sweetness and composure, to be the loveliest face he had ever seen.

"Mercy Lane," said the Cardinal, "you have showed us all the way. You were found doing what the Master did, when He came. It is your right to give the Church of the Future its name. What shall we call it,—this new place where, please God, He shall dwell, and toward which all men shall turn with new trust and confidence?"

"Let us call it not a church," she answered, quietly. "Let us call it The Christ-house!"

"The Christ-man, the Christ-house—yes, that completes the thought. The world cannot misunderstand that. And this hall where you have fed the least of these His brethren shall be the first Christ-house of the new world that begins to-day. May the Master ever dwell within this House!"

He lifted his hand as if in solemn dedication.

"And now let us salute the New Day with our prayers," he concluded.

They knelt together in the doorway of the dance-hall. Through the clear air rang the solitary bell in the ruined belfry, with its joyous Christmas message.

The dawn had come in all its fulness now. The terror of night was past, and the pure, clear light shone upon them as they knelt, and clothed them with its living gold. The Dawn had come, and each knew that it would be unfading.

EPILOGUE

AND HE AWOKE, AND BEHOLD IT
WAS A DREAM!

SLOWLY the figures of his dream withdrew, and the voices, thin as echoes, died away in distance. As one beholds below his feet, from some mountain height, a tumbled sea of clouds, from which emerge one by one the crags and turrets of the submerged earth, so he saw his old familiar world return to him. The sea of fantasy upheaved itself in one long, lucid wave; it broke in glittering spray, and spread in streaming scarves of tinted vapour; these in turn dissolved; and then the whole sea sank, and the plain outlines of the world appeared.

Recognition came to him at first feebly and reluctantly. He did not wish to wake. He caught at the flying skirts of vision with impatient hands. This resuscitation of the normal world was full of pain; it was like the torture drowning men have known, when the suspended life once more resumes its functions. He had tasted liberty, he had moved in the boundless; and now his old taskmaster, Life,

had overtaken him, and the hounds of Time and Space were baying at his heels. A strong resentment shook him, and he sobbed aloud.

This resentment was of brief duration. It was succeeded by an effort at readjustment which stretched every nerve and sinew with a living pain. His heart laboured wildly, his eyes ached and throbbed, his hands groped, feeling after the familiar. Where was he? He became slowly aware of himself. It seemed he was a creature of ponderable shape. Walls rose around him, and the height of the firmament contracted to a square of whitewashed ceiling. The solid world was rushing at him, pushing him back; the walls rose higher with each instant, and contracted round him. Escape was impossible.

Suddenly the struggle ceased. The turmoil of his labouring pulses sank to rest. He opened his eyes doubtfully; his groping hands touched some tangible and soft texture; he was conscious of a ray of sunlight falling on his face. Then he knew that the physical universe had resumed its rights in him.

He was not immediately aware of all that this discovery implied. He lay quite still, endeavouring to digest its meaning. He recalled the colours of the sunset he had seen, the figure, words, and emphasis of the strange preacher he had heard. All these things seemed to have happened a long

time ago; he regarded them impersonally, as things infinitely removed. The scenery and figures of his dream were much more real. The face of Mercy Lane, the voices of the Cardinal and Field and Stockmar, the bell ringing in the ruined belfry, the red cloud above the ruined city—all these things came back to him, upon a wave of ecstasy. It was the final onset of the impalpable upon his senses. The wave ran back, echoing in the porches of his memory, and returned no more. He was awake at last.

And with that came a revulsion of feeling, final and complete. He was at home once more in the tangible, plain world. The seventh heaven clanged its gates behind him; the wings fell from his shoulders; he was again a man with men, and the homely world of men saluted him.

O, sweet, familiar world, what joy to see it once more in its accustomed aspects! He sprang out of bed, and stood at the window. He saw men and women in the street, moving on the roads of common duty; the schoolhouse bell rang; children passed with cries of careless mirth; the broad sunlight lay upon the street. He stood dazed, trying to collect his thoughts.

O, sweet, familiar world! And sweetest thought of all, Helen was with him still. No doubt she waited for him in New York. She would meet

him with faithful hands outstretched to his. And there had been no vast catastrophe; no earthquake, and no flame of burning cities! The solid earth stood fast. All things were as they were.

Things were as they were in that outward world, but within himself he was conscious of a change. The inner landscape of his life was not the same.

He could not define that change; he hardly wished to do so. But he knew that he was not the same man. He woke as Adam woke from his deep sleep in Eden, to a world of new values and relations. God had been with him in his sleep.

One thing he knew, and his spirit received it with humbleness, as a revelation which nothing could annul; he could never live again as he had lived. His entire attitude to life was altered. He had ceased to be a looker-on. It was as though a weight of ice which had long lain upon his heart were melted. All his pulses beat with new freedom and desire. A soft wind had blown through his members, like that wind of the Pacific which passes through the gateways of the western mountains, and loosens in a single night the iron stricture of the frost; so that men who have closed their eyes at night upon the dreary sight of frozen plains, open them at daybreak upon the vision of the spring. The vision of the spring; the ancient woods green once more, and a hundred little rills of joy

singing round their roots; so he had awakened, with his whole nature mystically softened and renewed.

He must live differently: that was the imperative conviction which laid hold upon him. He had seen the ideal and he must live to make it real. He had dreamed, but he had dreamed true.

And in that moment he knew what this ideal was: it rose before him beautiful and lucid, an entrancing vision. This was what he had to realise, this Church of Charity, this simple and serviceable Church;—the Christ-man, the Christ-house—these terms could never be forgotten. And in this ideal Christ had come, after all, and had come to him. Henceforth he was a dedicated man. Men might believe or disbelieve; that mattered nothing. They might ridicule or oppose; he had reached “the silent seats above the thunder,” where neither their approval nor their scorn could reach him. He saw his path before him, not indeed with utter clearness, but he saw it. From it he could never turn aside. Dark shadows lay upon it here and there; dark shapes, with hooded brows, and stern lips, prophesying woe, moved upon it; but beyond them rose the hills of Light, crowned with music. And that music had the note of conquest in it. He could not fail. He might die upon the road, but death was not failure. Though bonds and afflictions awaited him, still he must go on—he would reach

Home at last. The hills of light, each a flame, a song,—ah, he must reach to them; he must, he would, for was he not henceforth a dedicated man?

He fell upon his knees, a supreme rapture filled his heart. An hour passed, and he was still praying. When he arose it was with a light of transfiguration on his face. For his face was set stedfastly toward the Jerusalem of triumphant crucifixion.

He gazed once more from the window upon the little town. The full noon lay upon the street. But for him a light brighter than the noonday sun lay upon his heart. The Past, with all its errors, was forgotten. He had at last an authentic message for the World.

An hour later he moved through the sun-bathed street with elated step. He knew that in those hours of vision he had received his commission from Him who makes all things new.

He was a Soldier of the Future.

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